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Israel's English Speaking Immigrant Parents' Family Language Policy Management: Language in the Education Domain

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Abstract

This study investigated family language policy (FLP) in the education domain by the English speaking immigrant community in Israel. In this study 232 parents completed the questionnaire on the availability of bilingual and/or English speaking preschools and/or kindergartens to them, their choice of linguistic environment for their children, and motives behind these choices, their attitudes toward bilingualism and toward English and Hebrew presence in their lives. About half of the parents reported not having bilingual and English only early education options for their children. Although most participants chose Hebrew early education settings, majority of those who reported having a choice, did select an alternative option for their child/children. Attitudes of parents in our sample were largely positive toward bilingualism and immersion programs. We found that, regardless of their attitude toward the amount of Hebrew and English in their lives, most parents' motivation in selection of early education settings was not emotionally driven, but rather logical and perhaps instrumental. Our findings point to complex motivational and attitudinal approaches of parents in selection of early education's linguistic environment for their children and the need for more bilingual and English early education settings in different parts of Israel to cater to this community.

Keywords: Family language policy, Bilingualism, Bilingual education, Attitudes, Motivation, Immigrants, Second language acquisition

1. Theoretical Background

1.1 Family Language Policy and the Education Domain

Bilingualism is a reality for many. Immigration and cultural diversity provide the context and need for pluralism in language knowledge, but also face the difficulties coupled with this reality of heritage language maintenance in second and future generations within the new linguistic communities. Fishman (1970) postulated a three-generation theory according to which the first generation in the new linguistic community adds the new language to their linguistic repertoire, the second generation grows up bilingual, and the third shifting to the dominant majority language, losing all or much of the heritage language (HL) and growing up monolingual. Hakuta and D' Andrea (1992) among others state that most bilingually balanced to be the second generation immigrants, having benefitted from the early exposure to the HL as well as the dominant or host language. Although this generation can potentially impart their knowledge of the HL to the next generation, the extent and type of exposure to the HL received by the next (third) generation is varied to say the least (Hoff, 2006). This difference has been seen to be related to cultural or ethnic identity of the second generation (Extra and Yagmur, 2010) as well as other factors. The loss of HL is marked by the lack of natural intergenerational transmission which occurs in the family and is further supported by other language policy 'Top Down' domains such as the school, workplace, and the government among others. Family language policy refers to the language beliefs or ideologies, practice, and management components and is a key domain in HL maintenance or loss. FLP has its key participants: parents, children, and other family members such as the grandparents. Each of these participants may hold different beliefs or ideologies toward language practice, and may try to manage language practice in different ways, both consciously and subconsciously. For example, while first generation immigrant parents may believe in preserving the HL within the family by managing language use in the home through practicing or speaking only the HL, children, when old enough and once they enter formal educational settings will exert their own influences on the home/family language domain by potentially introducing different beliefs and practices which are introduced by the new domain: the school (pre-school, kindergarten, etc.). Children can and do instigate certain language use explicitly or implicitly through the use of that language (Pearson, 2007), practicing their rights as key participants in their family's language policy and affecting its course. Educational institutions and schools have been found to be particularly influential on FLP through their policies coupled with the amount of time that children spend in school-related environments. The school' ...has turned out to be one of the most powerful institutions attempting to influence the family domain by proclaiming the need for everyone to speak the language chosen as the instructional medium. Apart from family internal pressures the main theme is the conflict between school and home policies (Spolsky 2012:5).' Prevoo, Mesman, Ijzendoorn, and Pieper (2011) found a significant increase in host language (Dutch) use between mother and child between the ages of two and three, once the children entered preschool environments. Within the family domain then, the tensions between participants' needs, beliefs, ideologies, and practices will need to continuously be addressed and negotiated, however consciously or unconsciously, however overtly or covertly as these participants age and experience and interact with the world around them. Tennenbaum (2012)

points out ways that the family system perceives external reality and internal states, consciously or unconsciously, and utilizes their language policy to affect its well-being (57). She brings into the foreground the often neglected point of emotional aspects within the FLP which guide or at the very least affect the FLP functioning. We believe that the emotional aspects may very well be the main driving forces behind the policies within the home, but that the pressure of reckoning with it only become pertinent and pronounced once children exit the home, enter the schooling environments, and bring back the influences exerted upon them within this new domain.

1.2 Early Schooling in Israel: the Native Approach

Although Israel's communities are numerous and by and large vary in terms of organization, the State of Israel provides free pre-K and Kindergarten education to all children in the public school systems as of this year (2012). In other words, parents of children between the ages of 3 and 6 have the opportunity of enrolling their children in their neighborhood pre-K and Kindergarten institutions which are run by the Ministry of Education. The regular school day for children in this age group is between the hours of 7:30 and 2 Sunday through Thursday and 7:30 to 12:30 on Fridays, followed by the optional after school programs on Sundays through Thursdays offered in conjunction with organizations such as religious establishments or organizations such as the working woman's organization and are provided for a monthly fee. Although optional, many of the children in Israel remain in the after-school program from 2 pm and until 4:30 pm. A great majority of children's daily lives is spent in the school environment. It is no wonder that influences, both linguistic and others, are imparted to the children and brought into the home domain.

Although it is impossible to generalize due to the heterogeneous nature of Israel's population makeup in terms of culture, religion, and degree of religious practice, the majority of the Israeli born mothers are part of the working class and children as young as 3 months old (following the maternity leave allowances) are cared for by others. Child care for children younger than 3 years of age is privatized and ranges from family members such as grandparents, nannies, 'mishpachtons' or the private childcare by nannies in a group setting of 2 or more children, to private preschools run either by individuals or different organizations for a considerable monthly fee or tuition. The compulsory attendance in kindergarten in Israel is set at age 5 and up until that age parents make choices for their children's educational settings and paths, some enrolling their children in public establishments from age 3, while others remaining within the private institutions.

1.3 Bilingual, foreign Language, and Private Preschools in Israel

With a large number of immigrants in Israel and the need for early childhood education there has been an increase in the number of private preschools across Israel. In areas with large densities of single linguistic immigrant populations there has been an increase in the development of bilingual or foreign (HL) early childhood education establishments. For example, Russian speaking immigrants from the Former Soviet Union make up the largest sub-community in Israel (Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999) and from this reality the development of different and organized social structures (early childcare centers, newspapers, magazines,

TV stations, and others) came about allowing for increased ability and opportunities for HL maintenance (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Russian-Hebrew bilingual preschools and kindergartens were developed by the organization of immigrant teachers from the FSU who currently operate around 20 institutions in Israel. The target population for these institutions are the children of FSU immigrants and tend to be based on the first language first approach, therefore essentially operating as monolingual Russian preschools for children between the ages of 1 and 3 after which time Hebrew is introduced into the setting and a more bilingual approach is adopted (Schwartz, Moin, Leikin, and Breitkopf, 2010; Shwartz and Moin, 2012). In their study, Schwartz, Moin, Leikin, and Breitkopf (2010) compared the factors distinguishing between the groups of parents choosing bilingual or monolingual kindergarten settings for their children within the Russian speaking community in Israel. The two main differences found were the parents' cultural self-identification and the number of children within the family. Not surprisingly, those who identified more strongly with their heritage background and language tended to choose bilingual settings for their children, rather than the mainstream monolingual Hebrew settings. Families with fewer children were more likely to choose the bilingual option than those with more children. This finding is discussed in terms of time constraints that multiple children bring into the equation and the socialization of younger children by older ones or their influence on the FLP as the active participants of this domain, among others. Interestingly enough, Oller and Eilers (2002) and Phinney et al. (2001) found that higher socio-economic status corresponded with lower HL proficiency and use, pointing to perhaps the instrumental orientation of these families in encouraging the majority/host language use and development in and with their children and not the contrary assumption that higher socio-economic status SES may be associated with more resources and opportunities for maintenance of the HL. The constraints that multiple children bring into the equation as mentioned above and as related to lower HL maintenance may then not be connected to the material resources, but rather a combination of factors such as motivation, amount of time spent with children, and others. This is further supported by the finding by Van Tubergen and Kalmijn (2009) whose study linked higher educational level of partners to an increased use of host/majority language (Dutch) between those partners. Higher education may equal more personal and professional involvement in terms of cultural/ethnic-identification with the host community, increased SES, and lack of time, among other things. Alternately, the difference between the education levels and SES of parents as linked to HL maintenance may be related to the level of command over the host language and the resulting necessity or lack thereof to communicate in the HL, consequently promoting its development and maintenance in the next generation. In examining the differences of FLPs and HL maintenance among the highly educated English speaking immigrants who rated themselves as average or above on the measure of SES, we found a great majority of mothers who are native English speakers to be adhering to HL maintenance through FLP and FLP planning. The marked difference here may be the instrumental value of English on a global scale, as compared to other heritage languages examined in English or other western linguistic majority.

1.4 English and English speakers in Israel

Israel is truly unique in that it attracts a relatively large number of native English speakers to

immigrate and settle within her borders. Although not an official language of the State of Israel, English is highly regarded and sought after. It is part of the state's education curriculum starting as early as the first grade in some areas or grade four in others. The progress in English is tracked throughout the schooling span with national tests such as the Meitzav (in the 5th and 8th grade), the Bagrut (or the matriculation examination in High School), and again with the Psychometric exam as a requirement for application to one of Israel's universities. Meitzav and Bagrut and their format and content is aimed to reflect the standards and benchmarks of the English Curriculum assessing pupils' performances expressed in the form of tasks and projects (English Curriculum, 2001). Private English lessons funded by parents are highly common in Israel, pointing to the widespread belief and acceptance of its need and desirability for success in the educational and later professional spheres in Israel. The welcoming sentiment toward English is also exhibited in the linguistic landscape of the country, where signage including English language is present if not prevalent (for more on English in Israel please refer to Kayam and Hirsch, 2012). This inclusive and welcoming reality toward English in Israel is conducive to English as home language maintenance, at least to some degree. For this reason we speculate that the English speaking community has been slower at organizing itself in terms of English-only and bilingual educational settings (with the exception of the preschools, kindergartens, and schools created for the children of diplomats and other temporary residents in Israel) compared with the Russian speaking community.

1.5 Bilingual and English-Only Preschools and Kindergartens in Israel

With the flow of English speaking immigrants to Israel, some of whom arrived to Israel as partners or spouses of those related to Israel in terms of heritage and/or religion (Kayam and Hirsch, 2012) there has been, as of late, an increase in establishments of English-only and bilingual English-Hebrew preschools and kindergartens in the private sector. In Tel Aviv alone, there have been numerous efforts by the new immigrants to open private childcare centers to provide alternate opportunities for their own children and for the children of other English speakers within Israel. A real business opportunity has been recognized and has been in the process of being addressed. For example, a preschool called Love English in the north neighborhood of Tel Aviv initially opened its doors as a bilingual English-Hebrew preschool catering to children ages 1-4, only to revise its' linguistic policy within the first year and becoming an English only preschool. This preschool was opened by two English speaking immigrants from USA and Canada, both holding an advanced degree in Education and in the 3 years since its establishment has become very popular and sought after. Interestingly, families with children in this particular preschool include English speaking immigrants, 'mixed-language' couples, as well as native Israeli families who hope to provide their children with the head start in English education. This example alone points to the favorable climate toward English in Israel as well as a collective need and desire for English educational establishments in Israel. Another example of the developing English-only/bilingual educational terrain in Tel Aviv, Israel is the City Kids community center established by an American immigrant to Israel. It is a community center which provides different extracurricular classes and activities including English classes for native speakers during after school hours. It provides child-parent classes, and caters to many different interests and stages

from pre-natal stage through elementary school years for both parents and children. Once again, the clientele in this community center is mixed, with both native English speakers and native Israelis who hope to increase the exposure of their children to English.

2. Present Study and Research Questions

With the increased desire, need, and availability of English only and bilingual English-Hebrew establishments we were interested in uncovering the actual practices in terms of early childhood educational setting selections by immigrants of the English speaking community in Israel. In investigating the availability-choice relationships we are interested in better understanding the FLP management of the English speaking immigrant community in Israel. This paper is second in a series investigating the FLPs of the English speaking community in Israel. In the first paper we addressed the questions of who our participants are, their background and demographics, as well as their FLP practices in different relationships within the family domain and the extent and type of planning that occurred prior to the establishment of the FLP (in years prior to having children and/or in the early months of parenting) (Kayam and Hirsch, 2012 in press)

The current study's research questions are directed at English speaking parents of young children in Israel. Through our research we were interested in exploring the following:

1) Availability of bilingual English-Hebrew and/or English only preschools accessible to our participants.

2) Which linguistic environment was chosen by the parents for their children and the reasons behind these choices?

3) In cases where there was a choice, which linguistic environment was chosen?

4) Attitudes toward bilingualism and immersion language programs.

5) Satisfaction with the preschool environment chosen.

2.1 Method

The present study is conducted using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire was created for the current study and was conducted via the Internet, social media channels, and through the use of online data collection tools.

Our target population included parents of children up to the age 6 where one or both parents emigrated from an English speaking country to Israel, or in which one or both of the parents spent a considerable amount of time living in an English speaking country and who identified with and spoke English on a native level. We reached our participants via the internet because we wanted to make it as simple as possible for participants to take part in our study. Parents of young children are very busy and asking them to take time out of their busy day, physically, would have made it impossible for some parents to participate. Our suspicion that parents would be more easily reached via the Internet was supported by a recent finding which says that parents, particularly mothers, spend more time on Facebook after giving birth (Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman, Kamp Dush, and Sullivan, 2012). Making our

questionnaire more easily accessible to our target population across Israel made it possible to obtain a more diverse and relatively large sample and therefore strengthening the internal validity of our study. Our aim was to reach this linguistic community regardless of their location within the country, and regardless of their immigration status or religious orientation. We wanted to gain an insight into FLP processes within the linguistic community at large: new immigrants, expats, those living in Israel for a very long time, religious, non-religious, Zionist or not, Jewish, non-Jewish, etc. We saw the Internet as the tool which could make this goal possible. By being able to reach different corners of the country during the same time frame, we have removed the temporal distortion from our data. All of the participants participated during the same 3 months and during the same season (for more on how this study was carried out see Kayam & Hirsch, 2012).

The tool employed in creating the questionnaire and making it available online was the free Google Documents tool (see docs.google.com). The tool contained information about the study and researcher contact information page prior to the onset of the questionnaire, and the questionnaire itself. The questionnaire included demographical information, questions on FLP ideologies, practices and management, language attitudes, immigrant experiences, school selections, and others. Once submitted by participants, the responses were recorded and gathered automatically into a spreadsheet which was later converted into a Microsoft Excel file and SPSS file for data analysis. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous and did not provide any monetary incentives. Participants were reached through different immigrant organization's websites and e-mail lists, as well as social media channels such as the Facebook, and others. (For a detailed description of our approach see Kayam & Hirsch, 2012).

2.2 Participants

Two hundred and thirty two (232) participants completed our questionnaire, 192 (83%) Female (mothers) and 40 (17%) Male (fathers). Our participants were highly educated with 74% of the participants possessing a Bachelor's degree or higher (37% Masters Degrees and 6% PhD). Partners were also highly educated with 71% possessing a Bachelor's degree or higher (25% Master's degree and 9% PhD). Participants rated their family income as above average in 49% of the cases, average in 34% of the cases, and below average in 3% of the cases. Most of the participants were married (84%), 4% were not married but were living with their partners, 7% were single, and 4 % divorced. Participant's parents lived abroad in 73% of the cases, while partner's parents lived in Israel in 68% of the cases. Most participants did not grow up in a bilingual home, with 26% having been brought up bilingually. Most families had 1 or 2 children. In most couples, one of the partners immigrated to Israel from an English speaking country and reported using English in communication with their children (79%), most often the mother. The language of communication between the couples was in many cases English (59%) with some couples reporting code switching (11%) and 19% speaking Hebrew. Fathers reported using Hebrew in communication with their children in 38% of the families.

3. Results

3.1 Availability of Bilingual/English Preschools/Pre-K and Kindergartens

In order to better understand the availability and accessibility of bilingual and/or English schooling and/or child care environments, we asked the participants whether bilingual (English-Hebrew) schooling environment appropriate for the age of their children was available and accessible to them. Fifty per cent of the participants reported not having bilingual schools available or accessible to them, and 51% of the participants reported not having English schooling environments available or accessible to them. The rest of the participants reported having English and/or bilingual schools available and accessible to them.

3.2 Language in Schooling Environment

When asked about the linguistic environment of the school attended by their children, 82% reported having their children enrolled in the Hebrew Preschool, Pre-K, or Kindergarten, while 12% reported having their children enrolled in an English Preschool, Pre-K, or Kindergarten. Six per cent (6%) reported having their children attend a bilingual schooling environment.

3.3 Availability and Selection

Of those participants who reported having bilingual settings available and accessible to them, 75% reported selecting a bilingual program for their children and of those participants who reported having English only settings available and accessible to them, 82% reported selecting an English only program for their children. Pearson Chi-square test computed was χ^2 (4, N=189) = 32.43, p = .00 and χ^2 (4, N = 189) = 50.72, p = .00 respectively.

Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents reported choosing the school because it was conveniently located, and 12% reported not making their choice based on convenience.

3.4 Attitude towards Bilingualism

The attitude toward bilingualism in our sample was positive. When asked to respond to the statement: 'It is beneficial for a child to grow up with two languages,' 83% strongly agreed with the statement, and 5 % agreed with the statement.

Conversely, when asked to respond to the statement: 'A child growing up with two languages is confused, 'an overwhelming majority chose 'strongly disagree' option (78%) and 8% chose the 'disagree' option.

3.5 Satisfaction with the Choice of School

As mentioned above, most of the participants reported enrolling their children in Hebrew only schools. Almost half of the participants who reported being happy with their choice of schooling for their children were reported to be enrolled in the Hebrew only schools. Sixteen per cent of the participants reported having their children enrolled in the Hebrew only schools and not being happy with that choice. Eleven per cent (11%) of those enrolled in Hebrew only schools were neither happy nor unhappy about their choice, and six per cent of all participants reported having their children in English only schools and reported to be happy with their

choice.

3.6 Attitudes and Beliefs

Bilingual schooling was not viewed beneficial for psychological comfort, with only 15% of the respondents agreeing with the statement: 'Child needs psychological comfort, so bilingual schooling is preferable because they speak a language he/she understands.' In fact, 38 % of the respondents disagreed with the statement by choosing a 'completely disagree' and disagree ratings.

Immersion was viewed as helpful in language acquisition by 55% of the respondents who agreed with the statement 'Immersion in a language environment is very helpful; in language acquisition; therefore a Hebrew-speaking environment is preferable. Despite initial difficulties, he/she will be better prepared for school and for life in Israel.' Fourteen percent (14%) disagreed with the statement.

The respondents were divided in their views toward English and Hebrew prevalence in daily life and the need to use one language over the other in schooling. Forty eight per cent of the respondents did not feel that English at home was enough in replacing English schooling environment. Twenty seven per cent, however, agreed with the statement 'Our children spend enough time in an English-speaking environment (family, friends, etc.) and will acquire English in any case, so there is no need to promote English in the schooling environment.' The opposite response was given for Hebrew, with 50% of the respondents disagreeing with the statement ' There is enough Hebrew in our environment, they will acquire it in any case, so having our children in English only schooling environment is preferable,' and 20% of the respondents agreeing with the statement.

3.7 Satisfaction with the Schooling Environment

A little over a half of the respondents were happy with their choice of schooling for their children. Fifty four per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement ' I am happy with my choice of school for my child. (School refers to the schooling program to which the child belongs to according to his or her age).' Fourteen per cent reported not being happy with their choice.

4. Discussion

Although most of our participants did not grow up in a bilingual home, their attitude toward bilingualism was positive. In most families one parent had immigrated to Israel and had to learn Hebrew as a second language, and despite the challenges faced through the process of second language acquisition, our participants' attitudes toward bilingualism were overwhelmingly positive. They saw it as beneficial for their children to grow up with two languages and did not see it as confusing to the child. Interestingly enough, although most of the respondents (mothers) themselves learned Hebrew as a second language, they did not view it as necessary for child's psychological comfort to be in a bilingual schooling environment where the child can understand and be understood in a language that he or she is comfortable in. Learning a new language, especially at an older age, may pose psychological or emotional

hardships on the learner, so it is especially interesting that these parents who themselves experienced the process do not view it psychologically demanding enough on children to warrant the need for inclusion of the home language in the school. The widely accepted beliefs on benefits of bilingualism may be the reason or an explanation for their apparent 'insensitivities' to the psychological comforts provided by the inclusion of the home language in the schooling environment.

A little over half of the participants viewed immersion into a majority language positively and as beneficial in future successes of the child. Perhaps by experiencing difficulties in their adopted environment themselves, they are motivated to embrace the approach and view to parenting which will help their children avoid the frustrations brought about by language barriers. Although initially it may be viewed as purely instrumentally oriented motivation, the paring of the two opinions points to the possible motivation by parents to approach their children's development in the Israeli society through avoidance of experiences that they may have gone through. These parents seem to be focused on shielding their children against psychological discomforts and/or difficulties in life in Israel in the long run, rather than thinking about short-term psychological discomforts experienced initially. Only 27% of the participants felt that there was enough English in their children's environments (family, friends, etc.) and that there was no need to promote it in the schooling environment, and at the same time only 20% of the participants felt that there was enough Hebrew in their environment and that English schooling environment would be preferable. In other words, even though parents in our sample feel that there may not be enough English in their children's lives, they seem to recognize and act on the need for Hebrew proficiency. They do not think that that the environment is enough and choose to more often than not enroll their children in Hebrew schools. The interesting finding which has emerged is that parents seem to take on the existential view and approach to their children's linguistic development and realities. When asked if they are happy with the choice that they had made for their children in terms of schooling and language, 14% report not being happy, 54% report happiness, and the rest of the participants failed to answer this question. The question of happiness with the choices made regarding the linguistic environment for their children may be too complex to cover in one question and should perhaps be further explored. This logical, calculated, practical approach to survival in host linguistic environments is providing a clue into potential reasons behind HL loss and attrition and parental role in this process. First generation immigrant parents seem to focus on providing opportunities for their children in the new linguistic environments, while the second generation may be faced with the choice. Second generation essentially decides whether the heritage language is promoted and whether it survives in the next generation, or whether future generations become mainstream, largely monolingual natives of the once new or host environment. The current study is particularly interesting as it looks at English speakers as minorities in Hebrew majority linguistic environment. Although loss of HL (English) is not likely with future generations of this community due to the status of English in Israel and the world, strong ties of immigrants to their birth countries in this case, and focus on English by Israel's Ministry of Education, it does provide a clue into the perhaps emotionally fueled however logical approaches of parent's choices concerning language of education.

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