

# Bilingualism of Children in Immigrant families

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## ABSTRACT

This article mainly discusses racial discrimination and whether parents' attitudes will lose their mother tongue, at the same time, it also includes the study of whether children's learning of their mother tongue will affect their learning of a second language at the same time, so as to draw the attention of the immigrant family to put more focus on their children's mother tongue. This paper also discussed whether the children should give up learning his mother tongue for the sake of a second language. Many countries and schools advocate that bilingual children should be better integrated into the local language by abandoning their mother tongue, which is totally unreasonable. It is disrespectful that schools cannot deprive immigrant children of the right to learn their own language and culture. Studies have shown that bilingual children who learn their mother tongue can learn the school language better in school, and bilingual children will have a deeper understanding of the language than monolingual children. It is unwise to abandon a kid's mother tongue to learn a new language. What is more, children who learn bilingualism at the same time will have a deeper foundation in language, reading, and writing.

**Keywords:** *immigrant family, bilingualism, family impact, language development, balanced bilingualism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper will focus on children whose family immigrated to another country. The specific question discussed in this paper is that whether children should give up their mother tongue to learn a new language, and will their mother tongue be as fluent as they should be? Some people believe immigrant children will be more successful if they forget their mother tongue to focus on the language of their new country. This supposition is incorrect. Studies show the primary factors which influence the success of young bilingual immigrants are the family's attitude toward the mother tongue, the family's economic situation, and the school's allowance for education in the mother tongue.

## 2. ANALYSIS

The report *Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue* confirms the important role that children's mother tongue plays in bilingual learning [1]. According to the survey, 58% of immigrant children in Canada come from families with poor English. When children speak their mother tongue, although there is no substantial punishment, they are still excluded by their classmates and teachers at school. They receive a strong message that if they want to integrate into the group, then they

need to forget their own language and culture. It is very unwise to make children forget their mother tongue and deprive them of communication with their parents and their country. This can not solve the language problem, but also goes against the original intention of education. Because this is disrespectful for their country and culture. It is easy for children to lose their mother tongue if they are not trained at the beginning of school, but they can learn a new language quickly in school. The article then shows the positive impact of bilingualism on children's education. When children develop two or more languages in primary school, they will have a deeper understanding of the language or their own. This passage is written that the German philosopher Goethe once said, "The person who knows only one language does not truly know that language". Children also become more active when they deal with and understand two different languages. The essence shows that when children have a stable foundation of their mother tongue, they will have strong literacy in school. When parents can take the time to help their children develop their mother tongue, they are laying the foundation and making full preparations for their children to learn the language of school. This can be regarded as an educational success. For children, when the environment allows them to learn bilingualism, the two languages will not affect each other.

It is extremely important for children to lay a good foundation for their mother tongue at an early age. In *Only English by the Third Generation* report shows that they surveyed the mother tongues of second-and third-generation children [2]. The result shows that if children don't have a good foundation of their mother tongue when they were young, it will cause a big problem which their next generation will not be knowing any of their mother tongue. Even though this passage mainly focused on Asians and Europeans, the results still means the same thing. The paper *Enhancing Learning of Children from Diverse Language Backgrounds: Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual or Multilingual Education in the Early Years* suggests that bilingual families should continue to let their children learn how to write and read in their mother tongue [3]. Kids should also communicate with their parents in their mother tongue at home, and parents should maintain a positive attitude towards learning the mother tongue. If they have laid a good foundation of their mother tongue in primary school, they will be able to master a second language very quickly in the future. On the other hand, if the mother tongue that children are learning in primary school is suddenly cut off, their mother tongue will be lost soon. This is sure to have a certain blow to the child, and that their interest in learning new things may decline.

It is mentioned in the paper *The Home Language Environment of Monolingual and Bilingual Children and their Language Proficiency Applied Psycholinguistics* that many bilingual problems in children's early language development stem from the status and correct use of language in the family [4]. Part of the impact is closely related to family income. Higher-income families will choose to allow their children to participate in activities that can exercise their language skills, which are rarely seen by children from low-income families. In this way, children from low-and low-income families will gradually have different experiences.

In immigrant families, will children choose to lose their mother tongue in order to learn a new language? The paper *Rethinking Acculturation in Second Language Acquisition* compares the language practice of two immigrant families in Canada [5]. In the process, the author shows "subtraction" and "addition" in the language of children in the family. Subtractive bilingualism occurs when learning a second language at the expense of the loss of the mother tongue, while additive bilingualism is related to the development of second language proficiency, while there is almost no loss of the mother tongue. It discusses the potential impact of racism on language acquisition and opposes the promotion of subtractive bilingualism among children. The author has two families as subjects. They are Mai from Vietnam and Katarina from Poland. In the course of the study, the two families showed

diametrically opposite styles. In Mai's family, parents have a strict family style and incorrect ways of getting along with their children. In this family, children can only speak English, and their mother tongue is not accepted, so their mother tongue Vietnamese has gradually declined. In Katarina's family, parents and children have a very good and strong relationship, and the children in the family have not lost their mother tongue while learning English.

The author began to look for answers to the different language patterns of the two families, and his attention was turned to the family background of Mai. In an interview with Mai, Mai said that her sister-in-law was ridiculed for not being able to speak English, and that she felt very helpless when she saw her children's increasing English proficiency. Soon, Mai's sister-in-law lost her status and authority at home, and she got estranged from her son because she could not speak English. Her son also began to use English as a way for him to threaten to ask for money. So when Mai came to Canada, she was shocked by her nephew because he had changed so much and was so disrespectful to his parents. Mai said she found that her nephews grew up in a very different way. They were raised as Canadians and were never encouraged to learn Vietnamese and Vietnamese culture. They are not even interested in their own culture and say things like they hate their appearance.

In Katarina's family, Katarina is very worried that her daughter will lose contact with her when she grows up because she can speak English. Then their priest told the children to speak their mother tongue at home so that they could communicate with their parents when they grew up, because it was a very important thing. The priest told parents to rest assured that their children can still integrate into the local society if they can speak English outside. In this way, you can not only maintain the fluency of your mother tongue, but also learn English. With the support of Katarina, her daughter goes to learn his mother tongue, Polish, every Saturday.

Finally, in this article, the author overturns the lifestyle of subtraction bilingualism and proves that additional bilingualism can kill two birds with one stone and have a happier family.

This article shows that when a child of an immigrant family faces a mother tongue problem, it has a lot to do with whether he or she is willing to learn his or her own mother tongue, but the most important focus is on the parents' way of education.

Bilingualism will speak their mother tongue under a certain circumstances. The paper *It Is Called a Mother Tongue for a Reason: A Qualitative Study of Therapists* shows that a bilingual person will choose to use his or her mother tongue when expressing something serious, provided that his mother tongue is more fluent than a

second language [6]. There is an exception here, that is, when the person's second language is more fluent than his mother tongue, they will choose to express it more fluently. This article is mainly a study on the role of language in bilingual psychotherapy by the understanding of therapists. One of the findings is that in psychotherapy, bilingual customers often switch to their mother tongue because of imperfect second language expression, or they switch back and forth between the second language and the mother tongue, which is very typical and normal. Bilingual customers usually express strong emotions, feelings, and trauma with their mother tongue, because it will make them feel more comfortable and stress-free. This situation can be thought of as a specific coding of the brain when people experience these emotions or events in that particular language. For example, in dreams most people experience it in their mother tongue, because that is your subconscious language, and when you fall asleep unconsciously, the brain does not deliberately switch to the language that you are not familiar with.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the two questions raised at the beginning of this chapter have been answered. In *The Home Language Environment of Monolingual and Bilingual Children and Their Language Proficiency Applied Psycholinguistics*, it answered my question 1 about if children will give up their mother tongue [4]. The answer we get is yes, but the premise is influenced by the family. In Mai's family, anyone who can speak English will have a power at home. Children have been "white wash" to themselves, that is, to give up knowing all the culture of their own country, and even hate their appearance. All these factors are to integrate into the local society, but is it necessarily the right thing to do? No, not only will it not achieve the goal they want, but it will also alienate their parents because they only speak English. Studies have shown that continuous learning of their mother tongue will not affect their second language learning, but also enable them to maintain good communication and relationship with their parents.

Question 2 was answered by *The Home Language Environment of Monolingual and Bilingual Children and Their Language Proficiency Applied Psycholinguistics* [4]. The answer to if their mother tongue will be as fluent as they should be is also yes, but it depends on the attitude of parents in the family towards their children learning their mother tongue. Shown in *The Home Language Environment of Monolingual and Bilingual Children and Their Language Proficiency Applied Psycholinguistics*, Katarina families have very different views on their mother tongue [4]. She very much hoped that her daughter could continue to learn her mother tongue Polish, and their pastor also told the children to

communicate with their parents in their mother tongue at home so that they would not lose their relationship with their parents. It was the right thing to do, so Katarina sent her daughter to learn Polish every Saturday. In this survey, it is clear that whether bilingual children will continue to learn their mother tongue is proportional to the support and attitude of their parents.

### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Yitong Wang.

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