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# RESEARCH ARTICLES

# Second-Generation Language Maintenance and Identity: A Case Study

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While the benefits of bilingualism have been widely acknowledged, parents face many hurdles raising children bilingually. Factors such as consistency in language use, family, school, and social support networks, issues of ethnic and social identity, and the prestige value of language have contributed to successful bilingualism. This paper presents a case study exploring the maintenance of German in an English-dominant environment, the strategies the mother employed in fostering German, and how her strategies influenced the children's perceptions of German. The findings offer insights into nurturing bilingualism, particularly when community and school do not support the heritage language.

## INTRODUCTION

Raising children bilingually has been a topic of much discussion and research (e.g., Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 2004; Döpke, 1992; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Saunders, 1988.) While the benefits of bilingualism have been widely acknowledged (e.g., Andreou & Karapetsas, 2004; Krashen, 1996), there are many hurdles parents face in their efforts to raise children bilingually.

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Political and social attitudes toward bilingualism heavily influence the ability of families to raise their children bilingually (Cummins, 2005; Hornberger, 2000; Seeba, 1996). In addition, factors such as the necessity for consistency in language use (Li, 1999; Saunders, 1988), the importance of family, school, and social support networks (Cho, 2000; Tse, 2001b), issues of ethnic and social identity (Gaudet & Clément, 2005; Schecter, Sharken-Taboada, & Bayley, 1996), the prestige value of language (Garrett, Coupland, & Williams, 2003), as well as other social psychological concerns have been identified as contributing to successful bilingualism. While most research on bilingualism centers on language in schools and communities, relatively little research, especially in the United States, is conducted on family efforts to promote bilingualism without community and/or institutionalized educational support. This article specifically focuses on the efforts of one family to promote and maintain the heritage language (HL), which can be defined as a language other than the dominant language that is spoken in the home, often without institutional, community, or formal support systems.

## Review of Relevant Literature

There is no general consensus as to what exactly bilingualism is, but for our purposes here, we examine bilingualism in terms of the ability of interlocutors to communicate in two languages. (See, e.g., Baker, 2006 and Chin & Wigglesworth, 2007 for discussions of different interpretations of what it means to be bilingual). Regardless of the definition of what bilingualism is, bilingualism has been shown to provide solid cognitive benefits (Baker, 2006; Bialystock, 2009; Cummins, 2000). Despite the best efforts of parents and communities to foster and maintain two languages, bilingualism is often looked down upon and even reviled in the United States. Although the United States has always been a multilingual and a multicultural society, as a society it has not prided itself on maintaining or fostering the languages of its immigrants. In fact, the mother tongue of most immigrants has hardly ever continued beyond the third generation (Portes & Hao, 1998, 2002). Indeed, backlashes against bilingualism are apparent in such measures as the passage in 1998 in California of Proposition 227 that significantly limited access to bilingual programs in that state, and in the 2006 Amendment SA 4064 to Senate Bill Number 2611, which declared English the national language of the United States.

In looking at U.S. generational differences in heritage-language maintenance, the majority of third- and later-generation immigrant family members speak only English (Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stults, 2002). This is true even for descendants of Spanish-speaking immigrants to the United States where Spanish is prevalent and even more evident among immigrants whose languages are not as widely spoken. German, for example, while a vital immigrant language in earlier years, is now rarely even taught in high schools or institutions of higher learning (Seeba, 1996; Stevens, 1999). Although historically German immigration to the U.S. was high, especially from 1880–1920, it has since declined significantly, especially as compared with immigration from Spanish-speaking countries, particularly Mexico. In the period 1981–1990, for instance, foreign-born German immigration was 70,100, while foreign-born Mexican immigration was 1,653,300. In the period 1991–2000, the number of Germans immigrating to the U.S. dropped to 67,600, while the number of Mexicans immigrating rose to 2,250,500, accounting for 30% of all immigrants to the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

During the 19th century, many immigrant communities continued to use and promote their native languages through private and public schools, newspapers, and religious and community

organizations. Resistance and opposition to languages other than English, however, began to form in the late 19th, early 20th century until about the 1960s (Ovando, 2003). In 1968, with the Federal Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Act) and in 1974 with Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols*, bilingual education has emerged in the U.S., albeit with controversy and debate. Nevertheless, native language maintenance remains difficult, especially when there are no bilingual programs in the school and there is little community support.

Although many second and later generations have abandoned their heritage language, there are also many who have withstood language loss and have been able to retain it. Regardless of official policies, research has shown that the family is critical in encouraging and fostering bilingualism (Baker, 1995; Garrett et al., 2003; Hakuta & d'Andrea, 1992; Schecter et al., 1996). As reported in Schecter et al.'s (1996) study of Latinos' maintenance of Spanish in San Francisco and also documented in this study, successful bilingualism is not the result of a one-time decision but of a series of choices that serve to affirm and reaffirm the commitment to the HL. Fishman (1991) argues that the home environment and language habits are the most critical indicators for maintaining HL through the generations. Tse (2001a, p. 681) notes that parents can affect the amount of HL that their children are exposed to by their use of it at home, by locating outside opportunities that use the HL, by having their children attend HL-specific schools or programs, and by visiting the country or countries where the HL is spoken.

Furthermore, for bilingualism to be maintained successfully, other aspects, such as identity, also come into play (Martínez-Roldán & Malavé, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Cho and Krashen (2000), in their study of second-generation Koreans, for instance, found that there were four independent predictors of HL competence: parents' use of the language, travel to the home country, TV watching, and reading. Kondo investigated (1998) second-generation university students in Hawaii, who as children of Japanese immigrant mothers, maintained their Japanese language. Factors that may have contributed to this language maintenance include the mothers' speaking Japanese to their children and the mothers' search for Japanese experiences outside of the home, such as being educated in Japan and joining local groups/organizations, among others. In situations where children of monolingual parents attend dual-language or two-way immersion programs, it is the interest and determination of the parents that ensure students' enrollment in such programs, rather than bureaucratic policies.

Despite the best attempts of parents to maintain their HL or the language associated with their cultural background, as U.S. children grow older, their competency in the minority language generally declines, regardless of their attitude toward that language or bilingual educational policies (Cho, Shin, & Krashen, 2004; Espiritu & Wolf, 2000; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou, 2000). This is particularly evident when immigrants and their descendants are removed from a "natural community" of native speakers and the parents face multitudinous constraints in maintaining the HL (Schecter et al., 1996, p. 277). Nevertheless, there is anecdotal evidence, as well as research, indicating that bilingualism can be encouraged and maintained in such circumstances.

## THE STUDY

This paper presents the results of a case study exploring the sociopsychological factors impacting the maintenance of the German language in an English-dominant environment, despite social, educational, and environmental pressures against doing so. The purpose of the study is to

explore the experiences of one family in maintaining an HL, to examine the strategies the mother used in promoting German, and explore the children's attitudes toward the HL and to investigate their attitudes towards maintaining the HL. This study contributes to the knowledge base of successful HL maintenance to inform the practices of others desirous of raising their children bilingually, even under less than ideal conditions.

## METHOD

This study focuses on the strategies the mother employed in fostering and maintaining dual-language heritage, how the children perceived these maintenance efforts and the value of being bilingual, and explores the implications of the findings for other families desirous of maintaining an HL. In particular, the researchers investigate which language strategies the mother used and how these strategies influenced the children's perceptions of their heritage language and being bilingual speakers of English and German. Specifically, the research questions in this study were:

1. What language strategies did the mother use to encourage the children to develop and maintain their use of German in an English-dominant environment?
2. How did the children feel toward their use of English and German, and how were their attitudes influenced by the mother's language strategies?

This is a case study in the qualitative tradition. Qualitative research provides multiple opportunities to explore participants' views, emotions, and experiences. Because such research is by nature interpretive, themes emerge from participants' discourse, rather than having been determined beforehand (Guardado, 2002). Our work is informed by such researchers as Vickers (2002), who argues that researchers' stories and self-narratives, just like other empirical materials, add to our store of current knowledge.

Narrative research and narrative inquiry, discounted for many years, have appeared as a means of data collection in many academic fields to understand better human behavior and experiences (see, e.g., Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995; Polkinghorne, 2007). Though varied forms of narrative inquiry are available, research studies point to several commonalities. Among these is the importance of learning from participants, including the researchers, through their reported individual stories and their narrated personal and social experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry can contribute to our current pool of knowledge in a way different, yet as equally significant as so-called objective approaches to research (Vickers, 2002). McAdams (2001) argues that autobiographical stories help locate and define a person's self within a life story that is both continuous and oriented toward future goals and that these stories are a mirror of the culture in which the life story is both created and recounted. Only the storyteller has insights that an outsider neither has nor can have, and the interpretations the insider makes flow from the insider's familiarity with the issue under investigation (Vickers, 2002, p. 619).

These stories comprise the data gathered through structured interviews or informal conversations with the study participants. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) remind us that stories or field texts are the raw data that the researchers analyze and then they retell or re-story the participants' experiences in rich detail. In the retelling of the stories, the researchers identify prevalent themes or categorize general trends that seem to emerge from the story, thereby adding this element to

their qualitative data analyses. As data are collected and analyzed, the participants are consulted for further elaboration and clarification. When one of the researchers, in this case the mother, also functions as the storyteller, then the narratives that are provided by the mother and the shared family history about the use of German and English offer an added dimension to narrative inquiry.

The children's recounting of their life memories in this study, providing support and personal accounts about their beliefs regarding the German language, cultural differences, and identity issues, falls into this area. The mother is the key storyteller in this case study, and it is she who helps locate and define the family subculture. As a case study falling within this type of research, the study is interpretive and naturalistic in nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), relying on semistructured oral interviews with the family members and on the life stories or self-narratives.

The interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit the children's perceptions of German, factors they feel important in maintaining or not maintaining German, and their overall attitudes toward the use of German and English (see Appendix A). The personal narratives, both those that come out in the interviews and those told by one of the researchers, reveal the individuality and the cultural as well as family identity of each particular person situated within this particular family where the mother is struggling to maintain an HL in a given social setting (McAdams, 1996; 2001).

## Participants

The family that participated in this study consists of five members: The mother, Alisa, a first-generation bilingual speaker of German and English; the father, Colin, who has a rudimentary grasp of basic German phrases and expressions; Marisa, the oldest child, a 16-year-old girl at the time the study was initiated; Lukas, a 14-year old boy; and Gregory, a 12-year-old boy. They have lived in different middle-class suburban neighborhoods where there were no other German speakers of the same ages as the parents and/or children. At the time of the interviews, the family had lived in the same neighborhood for 5.5 years. The mother has spoken German exclusively with the three children since their birth; the father has spoken only English to them.

### *The Mother*

The mother, Alisa, grew up in a German-speaking home in northwestern New York State. Her mother had immigrated to the northeastern United States several years after the end of World War II. There she met and married Alisa's father, a first-generation Italian-American, who was continuing his doctoral studies in German after having completed his military service. After completion of his doctoral studies, the family moved to follow job opportunities. Both parents insisted on maintaining the German language and culture in the home while Alisa was growing up, although all of her formal schooling was in English until high school, when she took high school German courses.

While a student in high school and in college, both undergraduate and graduate, Alisa spent longer periods of time in Germany, ranging from 3 months to 1 year. As an undergraduate, she majored in German and Spanish. Later in graduate school studying applied linguistics, Alisa maintained her German, even after she met her husband, Colin, who did not speak it or any other

foreign language when they met. He has picked up rudimentary German phrases and expressions over the years.

As Alisa and Colin were raising their children, they lived in middle-class neighborhoods in three different parts of the country—Kentucky, Florida, and finally New Jersey, where the present study was conducted. Although there were some native speakers of German in all three areas where they had lived, they were few and far between. The majority of these were closer to Alisa's mother's age than to her own age, a reflection of the relatively low numbers of Germans immigrating to the United States today.

### *The Father*

Colin grew up in a monolingual household, and his exposure to a foreign language was limited to high school French. Colin's family background consisted of a mix of Scottish, English, Irish, and German ancestry. The most recent family member to have emigrated to the U.S. was a great-grandmother, whom he had never known, and Colin repeatedly stated that he was "American" and did not identify with any particular ethnic group. After he and Alisa were married, they lived in Belgium for 1 year, where they had many opportunities to visit Germany. Colin first felt the lack of knowing German when he couldn't really communicate with most of Alisa's family directly and had to rely upon her to translate. After returning to the United States, Alisa and Colin continued to visit Germany, although Colin's German skills remained rudimentary.

Because of Colin's lack of German, he interacted with the children only in English, except for basic words and phrases such as *Deck' den Tisch* (set the table) or *Jetzt ist es Bettzeit* (It's now bedtime). Nevertheless, he explicitly encouraged their exclusive use of German with Alisa and supported Alisa's efforts to raise the children bilingually. One year, instead of flying together with Alisa and the children to Germany, Colin flew later to meet them. For the first time, he had to negotiate his way alone from the airport to the town where the family was spending the summer, a 3-hour drive along secondary and local roads. It was at this time Colin realized that while he had picked up some basic spoken German, he couldn't read any of the words on the signs because he had never learned to read German. Afterwards, when the children voiced their objections to having to attend German Saturday school, Colin would remind them of what he had gone through and how lucky they were to be attending this school and to be bilingual.

### *The Children*

The three children, one girl and two boys, are close in age; Marisa and Lukas are 21 months apart, and Lukas and Gregory 18 months. Although Marisa was born when Alisa and Colin lived in the New York City area, Colin's company offered him a transfer, and they moved to a suburban neighborhood in Louisville, Kentucky, when Marisa was just over a year old. The family lived there for 3.5 years, during which time Lukas and Gregory were born. Subsequently, Colin took a new position with a large company in south Florida, and the family moved to a suburban neighborhood northwest of Fort Lauderdale, where the children were raised until they were 11, 8, and 7 respectively. Thereafter, Colin was transferred to New Jersey. At the time of the study, they had been living just over 4 years in a small suburban town in the most northeastern part of the state.

At home with their mother (and the occasional German visitor) they spoke exclusively German, watched only videos in German, and were surrounded by German print, ranging from

books to magazines, to popular posters in their rooms. Through church contacts, Alisa did meet some older German immigrants, but these provided few and very limited opportunities for the children to interact with native speakers. In New Jersey, the children were enrolled in a German school, but classes were small and the majority of learners were having their first (and often only) real exposure to the German language. The school did provide the children support for development of their reading and writing skills.

## Data Collection

Two semistructured interviews in both German and English were designed for the data collection. The questions asked were identical in both languages and were open-ended to encourage narrative responses (See Appendix A). The interviews were conducted over a 2-day period in October of 2005 in the children's home and were also video recorded. Each child was interviewed for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted by one of the authors, who is bilingual in German and English and whom the children had known for several years. Because the children were familiar with the interviewer and had interacted with her previously in German and in English, they felt comfortable speaking with her in both languages while being videotaped.

The interviewing took place in the children's home, a familiar and relaxed setting. Although all the family members were present in the home during the 2 days of interviewing, each child was interviewed individually in a quiet room with a video camera on a tripod set up in one corner of the room. The other children were not present and could not overhear the interviews. The researcher and child sat in opposing armchairs in view of the camera. The mother, as storyteller and researcher, added her comments, thoughts, and impressions, and both researchers took field notes prior to and over the course of the study to gain insights into the strategies used, the children's perception of German, and how being bilingual affected them as individuals.

On Day 1, the interviews were conducted in German. On Day 2, the interviews were repeated in English. The rationale for repeating the interviews in English was to explore whether or not the children would provide different or additional information and/or discuss affective factors more in one of the two languages.

## Data Analysis

Two copies of the videotape were made, one for each researcher. The six videotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers. Data analysis of the transcripts revealed no noticeable differences between the children's responses in German and in English in terms of length of response or content of response. The children basically produced comparable answers in either language, even though the interviews took place on different days.

The data were subjected to an inductive analysis in order to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than being determined or imposed prior to the interviews. These themes were categorized according to how the children's responses reflected answers to the researchers' original questions: What language strategies the mother used to encourage the children to develop and maintain their use of German in an English-dominant environment, and the children's feelings in their use of English and German, and how these were influenced by the mother's language strategies.

## DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

### Mother's Language Strategies

In response to the first research question regarding the language strategies the mother used to encourage the children to develop and maintain their use of German in an English-dominant environment, the results indicated that the mother's language strategies played an important role in the children's bilingualism and in their positive identification with the German language and culture. The mother's language strategies fall into three categories. First, Alisa adhered strictly to the one-parent/one-language principle (Döpke, 1992). Second, Alisa promoted exposure to native-speaking German language and culture environments as much as possible; and finally, Alisa attempted to surround the children with German print and other media. These strategies have played a major role in having formed and maintained the children's positive attitudes toward German and being bilingual.

### One-Parent/One-Language Rule

Alisa is a trained applied linguist and concerned that her children not grow up as monolinguals. When the oldest, Marisa, was born, the mother, although fluent in both German and Spanish, made the decision to speak only German with her because of family ties. When Marisa was 1.3 years of age, Colin was transferred to another part of the country, to an area where at the time there were no speakers of Spanish. At the time of the move, Alisa left her full-time university appointment, taught part-time at local universities, and had two more children, Lukas and Gregory, allowing her to spend large amounts of time with all three children.

Although monolingual, Colin was very supportive of the mother's efforts to raise the children bilingually and her one-parent/one-language approach**.** He has often expressed regrets that he is not fluent in another language and believes it is a great benefit that his children are. Alisa recounts that the father, in support of her one-parent/one-language rule, has in recent years frequently chided the children when they did not want to speak German with her:

> Lukas, quit being a jerk. You speak German with your mother and just be glad you can. I have to go to Chile again next week and even after all these years with your mother [who is also fluent in Spanish] and listening to her and her friends, I can't say much more than "*una cerveza por favor"* and "*Dónde está el baño*." It's embarrassing; all these guys I work with down there know at least Spanish or Portuguese and Dutch or German and English and sometimes more. Do you realize what a gift it is to grow up knowing German without any effort? So quit giving her flak and just do it and be happy you can. (Field notes)

Alisa reports that in her experience, and as supported by research (e.g., Okita, 2001), spousal support is essential in continuing the process of bilingualism in a family. She notes:

> Bilingualism doesn't just happen. You have to work at it all the time. It's pretty easy when the kids are young and you're with them all the time, but when you're not number one in their life, when all the other influences start coming into play, that's when you need even more the support of your spouse. I have friends who come from lots of different family backgrounds, are bilingual themselves, were sure that they would raise their kids bilingually, but if their husbands didn't buy into it completely, the kids more and more lost their ability in the other language. I remember being at my

> friend Gloria's house a couple of years ago. She's from a Cuban family, a large extended family, had a Cuban nanny for years, and all her kids spoke Spanish to some degree, but one day her husband started yelling, "goddamnit, speak English so I can understand what's going on." So, whenever they're with their dad, everyone speaks English, and the kids, especially the younger two, hardly speak any Spanish anymore, although they can understand it. (Field notes)

Parents are the ones who decide their children's language experiences. It is they who choose to enroll their children in dual-language or two-way immersion programs when such programs exist. It is they who can encourage their children to speak two languages concurrently and to code-switch when necessary. Positive parental attitudes and supportive interactions at home, however, are only part of the equation. It is the children who must feel the need to use both languages in daily life that completes the equation. When children feel a status differential between their HL and English, the loss of the HL is accelerated, even at very young ages (Olsen et al., 2001; Tse, 2001b). Children must receive affirmation and purpose in their HL use, whether through the home, the school, or a combination of both. Generally, the parent who is the primary caretaker (most often the mother) is also the one to make the decision whether or not to maintain the HL (Okita, 2001).

In the early years, Colin was able to pick up basic German phrases, and he himself watched repeatedly the BBC German language-learning video program *Muzzy*. As the children became older, and their cognitive abilities and language skills became more sophisticated, it became increasingly difficult for Colin to participate in the use of German. Nevertheless, he continued to support the mother's efforts. One compromise the parents achieved was that if Colin found himself unable to follow a topic being discussed in German, Alisa would repeat it for him in English. An interesting result of this practice was that the children became adept at maintaining code-switching, e.g., while sitting at the dinner table as a family, conversing with Alisa in German and with Colin in English often on the same topic.

Alisa, however, *never* deviated from the one-child/one-language rule, regardless of time or place. She based her actions on the belief, supported by research, that HL maintenance is related to parental use (Cho & Krashen, 2000; Döpke, 1992; Portes & Hao, 1998, 2002; Saunders, 1988). If using German were not possible, she would avoid looking at her children as if in some way setting up an invisible barrier. Although Alisa did receive criticisms at times for this, she felt that any deviations would eventually cause, or at the very least contribute to, a loss of the HL, especially since she was essentially the only conduit of the HL. Alisa described how she had seen this happen in other families in her experience, even in situations where both parents were HL dominant. In keeping with Schecter et al.'s (1996) claim that bilingualism is a series of choices, Alisa also commented:

> Many parents who had ostensibly been dedicated to raising their children bilingually gave up because it took too much work. The kids want to speak basically what everyone else does since they're surrounded by English, and it's just easier. It takes a lot of work and creativity to keep up with the other language. (Field notes)

### Native German-Language Environment

Alisa went with the children to Germany almost every other summer for relatively short time periods, ranging from 5 weeks to 1 week. They alternated staying with family, friends, and in

hotels. Although the children had contact and interacted with native speakers, the children had limited opportunities to meet and play with children their age.

Alisa worked on developing the children's German reading and writing skills with them at home initially. Later the children enrolled in a German-language school recognized and supported by the German government. Marisa entered at age 10, Lukas at age 8, and Gregory at age 7. Classes meet once a week on Saturdays for 1 hour and 45 minutes and follow the regular school calendar of the local school district. Because they are enrolled in a Saturday German school, they are also exposed to some German outside the home. After a few years attending the Saturday German school, the children also made some friends with whom they enjoyed interacting, although left to their own devices, the children and their friends socialized in English. When engaged in the classroom, or for extracurricular "German-time" get-togethers, they did use German with each other and with the adults. Once these friends moved away or left the program, however, this social interaction ceased.

The children also speak German with their German grandmother, who lives in another part of the United States, when she comes for visits. These visits occur two to three times a year for about a week in each instance. The children will also speak some German with their aunt, their mother's sister, when they visit her about once a year. In addition, when Alisa's friend and research colleague, who was born in Germany, comes for visits, the children speak German with her as well. Gregory noted that for him to speak German means that he keeps up German for himself and with everyone in his family. He finds it "really great" because he can speak more than one language and can communicate by himself in different ways, which he finds important.

Cho (2000, p. 333) notes that HL development can be an important part of identity formation and instrumental in retaining a strong sense of identity to one's ethnic group. There are not only sociocultural advantages, but also personal and societal ones. A strong command of their HL leads to a deeper knowledge of cultural values, ethics, and manners; enhances interactions with other HL speakers; and results in a strong sense of ethnic and cultural pride. Research has invariably shown that retaining one's HL along with English has cognitive, social, and cultural benefits (Bialystock, 2009; Krashen, 1998; Schecter & Bayley, 1997).

## Exposure to German-Language Media

The children's exposure to German in their early years was extensive. German books, audiobooks on tape, and German-language videotapes surrounded them. Even when the children had sitters, they were not permitted to watch American television. This was no hardship to the parents, as they themselves watched little or no TV and did not have cable. The children were not exposed to any English-language television until Marisa turned 14, at which time it became increasingly difficult to prevent their watching television, and of the three children she became less inclined to watch the same German videos repeatedly. In addition, Colin had cable installed, so there was more television available in the household. Lukas and Gregory continued watching German-language videos extensively until Lukas was in the eighth grade (age 13) and Marisa in the fifth grade (age 10/11).

At bedtime, the children were read stories in German until the end of seventh grade (Marisa, age 13), the beginning of seventh grade (Lukas, age 12), and the summer between fourth and fifth grade (Gregory, age 11), at which points they decided that they no longer wanted to be read to. After story time, the children listened to audiobooks until they fell asleep. This continued

through seventh grade for Marisa and Lukas and through fifth grade for Gregory. When driving in the car, the children also listened to audiobooks. This practice ended during daily driving when Marisa was in eighth grade and refused to listen any more, but she still enjoys the audiobooks on long drives.

## CHILDREN'S FEELINGS

In response to the second research question regarding the children's feelings toward their use of English and German and how these were influenced by the mother's language strategies, the results revealed the children's perception of HL and being bilingual, their attitude toward HL maintenance, their interest in German media, and age and language maintenance.

### Children's Perception of HL and Being Bilingual

In the interviews, all three children expressed the feeling that speaking anything but German with their mother felt strange. In their interviews, the three children explained that they speak only German, whether at home or elsewhere, with their mother and only English with their father, with a few minor exceptions. This is consistent with Döpke (1992) and Saunders (1988) and the one-parent/one-language approach. Of note was an event that occurred during the time of the study. Marisa found herself in a situation where for the first time her mother was forced to speak a sentence to her in English. Marisa recounted that at first she didn't know what to say because it was so odd to have her mother use English with her and then automatically answered her in German anyway because that was what felt right. Alisa has pointed out that when there was a need for English to be used because there were other children or parents present, she would address her English remarks or comments to them, but repeat them in a lower voice to her own children. This experience also underscores the point that bilingualism is a series of choices. By having made the overarching conscious decision to use the HL at all times and in every situation with her children, the children had learned to associate their mother solely with German, thus providing a permanent and consistent opportunity for them to use their German-language skills.

The acquisition of a language is part of the socialization process of children. Although educational support is invaluable, it is frequently unavailable, and it is then that the family becomes crucial in HL maintenance. Through their interactions with older or more experienced speakers (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002), young children not only acquire knowledge, but they also practice linguistic and social skills. They learn their cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms through their interactions with their parents and other family members who influence a child's language acquisition. Thus, the family is the primary socializing influence on young children in a cultural context (Super & Harkness, 1997). Toman (1993, p. 5 as cited in Li, 1999, p. 113) argues that "a person's family represents the most influential context of his life, and it exerts its influence more regularly, more exclusively, and earlier in a person's life than do any other life contexts." Alisa's decision to adhere strictly to the one-parent/one-language dictate was a conscious effort to instill not only language skills but also to develop their pride in German culture and develop their sense of identities as German Americans.

This was evident in both the descriptions by the mother of her attempts to surround the children with German when they were young and the comments by the children. Bilingual children

do not just happen (Okita, 2001). It requires a great deal of effort and work on the part of the caretaker(s), especially if there is little or no educational support or reinforcement. The mother, the primary caretaker in this case, consciously surrounded the children with German as much as possible.

Lukas and Gregory indicated that they had always spoken more German with their mother than English with their father when they were young because she was home more than their father, who worked. Although Marisa claimed that she had spoken about as much German as English when young, her mother noted that as the oldest child, Marisa had been surrounded by German even more than Lukas and Gregory. At that time her father traveled extensively, so Marisa saw him essentially only on weekends and holidays.

In the data, the three children revealed their reasons for being proud of the fact that they are bilingual and for wanting to continue using both languages. In his English interview Gregory stated:

> To speak German, it means that I upkeep (sic) German for myself and with everyone in the family. And it's really great because I find that I can speak more than one language and that I can communicate by myself in different ways. I find that important. (Interview)

In addition, Gregory pointed out that not only does he like speaking German, but that he finds German helpful:

> I have the feeling that I am learning something and that it helps me to express my thoughts in many ways, some in German and some in English. And so it is truly enjoyable. I speak German primarily with my mother, except when I have to clean up my room. Then I don't want to speak German because I will do it (clean up his room) anyway. Otherwise, it is good to speak German. (Interview)

Marisa feels that being bilingual gives her not only motivation but distinct advantages. In the interview, when asked what she thought about speaking German, Marisa felt that "it is simply good to know another language." This was underscored on a recent trip Marisa took to Austria with Alisa and Gregory. While Alisa and Gregory went skiing, Marisa took daily excursions on her own to different cities, and she was thrilled by her ability to communicate effectively with the German-speaking people around her and by being able to fully appreciate the German-language descriptions of exhibits in various museums. Marisa's ego was also stroked in that she was able to help different English-speaking tourists who were lost find their way around Innsbruck and Salzburg. We suggest that the value of language retention and its relevance for the maintenance of ethnic and/or cultural identity are manifested in the children's positive attitudes toward German and their identity as German Americans, which have been consciously and consistently fostered by Alisa's language strategies.

## Children's Attitude Toward HL Maintenance

Parents and peers, along with their values and their attitudes, play a part in the formation of ethnic identity, particularly for adolescents. Phinney, Romero, Nava, and Huang (2001) suggest that ethnic affirmation plays a crucial role in forming self-concept because people value membership in their groups and derive self-esteem from belonging. The children travel with their mother to Germany approximately every other year for short visits of 1 to 5 weeks. Even though these visits are often short, they do help the children's German and their willingness and desire

to maintain the language. Marisa and Lukas respectively commented that they like visiting Germany "because it's a great country" and "it's great to hear other people speak German." They look forward to going again. In particular, Gregory's connection with his German ethnic identity becomes apparent when he said how he likes Germany and the German people:

> When the time comes to go back to Germany, I like to be in Germany. I can't wait, like last summer. . . . It has to do with the culture and that's the greatest. I like the German words, the Germans, and to visit. I like the way the Germans are in Germany, the German personality. I like the food and in Germany everything is opposite from New York; I like that better. I would like to go again because it is fun to visit the old houses and cities and to see how the culture was then and is now, and how it has changed. (Interview)

Such comments underscore the findings by Schecter et al. (1996) that language choice and use in the home reflects acceptance or rejection of the parents' ethnic identities. An important factor in children's active commitment to maintaining their bilingualism is their identification with the ethnicity of the HL, as exemplified by both Gregory's comments and similar ones by Marisa and Lukas. For them, German, like English, is part of who they are, and Alisa's attempts to make them appreciate German culture by visits to the country are instrumental in promoting these positive feelings.

In addition, the children's responses revealed that for them bilingualism was not just about identity, but that it provided them with distinct advantages. Practical applications of bilingualism were noted by Lukas who said, "It [speaking German] helps sometimes. It is good if you are in a restaurant and the food is not good; then, you don't insult the people who made it (because you can say it in German)." Furthermore, all three children felt they had advantages over their monolingual friends. Marisa said, for example, "To write in English in school is very easy, and I can do the same thing in Spanish because many words in Spanish and German are similar." She also pointed out "when one applies to universities, one can say that one knows another language."

Likewise, Lukas said that he believes that he has advantages because "one understands more, and it is easy because I know another language in school … It helps me when I want to learn Spanish; it will be simpler since I know German." Gregory commented on the advantages of learning a language:

> When one learns a new language, one already knows how to translate languages and how each language changes. Those languages one knows, one can translate better, and the words and the letters one pronounces differently. It's great for me to be able to learn many languages. It is easier to learn another language when one already studies two or more languages; it is truly an advantage. (Interview)

Later, in the English interview, Gregory added, "It helps us learn about the culture and other cultures that are here in America."

### Children's Interest in German Media

Tse (2001b) found that strong proficiency in the HL was closely related to how much access and interest speakers had in HL reading materials. All three children read in German. Lukas and Gregory are fascinated by the comic book series *Asterix* and *Lucky Luke* and continue to read them regularly. Lukas primarily confines his reading to comic books. Marisa will read novels

extensively while in Germany; when at home she generally only reads for assignments for German school, although she will also occasionally read German sports magazines. Gregory, in addition to reading comic books frequently, likes popular novels that are bestsellers in many languages, such as the *Harry Potter* series. Gregory explains his strategies for reading as follows:

> Just now I'm reading a book called *Tintenherz* by Cornelia Funke. I read a lot of German, mostly books that I like, and the great books are those found in many languages. Then I buy them and read them in English and in German. Then I understand the book better; there are two opinions. I read German when I don't read English. Actually, when I read, I just read the book in English and afterwards in German. I read German just like I read English. (Interview)

The children also continue to enjoy watching German-language movies and have an extensive collection, including many cartoons. However, since they have gotten older, they no longer enjoy cartoons and are reluctant to watch a movie more than a few times, so it has become more difficult to provide them with consistent movie entertainment. While German movies are available for rent through such companies as Netflix and Blockbuster, there are simply not that many movies produced. Nevertheless, personal enrichment in the HL is essential in fostering the children's commitment to the HL. As the children have grown older, they themselves recognize this and actively seek out German movies to rent whenever possible; they also continue to read in German.

## Age and Children's Language Maintenance

Numerous studies have shown the rapid loss of HL fluency once children attend schools that do not support the HL language (Cummins, 1991; Tse, 2001b). Not only are the children no longer home as much during the day, but they are in school surrounded by English (unless they attend a bilingual or dual-language school). School and peers become the dominant influence in children's lives since this is the place where they spend most of their waking hours, learning in the classroom and socializing with English-speaking peers (Portes & Hao, 1998, 2002). This claim is supported by the children's answer to the question of how much English and German they speak on a daily basis. Their responses ranged from 65–80% for English and 20–35% for German. On weekends, the German percentage is much higher since they are home with their mother, and German school is on Saturday.

As Marisa, Lukas, and Gregory have grown older, their exposure to German has lessened. They are no longer home as much with their mother; they have begun to prefer English-language television to German-language videos; they no longer want to listen to audiobooks, preferring instead to listen to music on their MP3 players; several close German family members have passed away, lessening the children's ties to the country, the language, and the culture. Their time devoted to school, extracurricular activities, and socializing with their friends has also lessened the amount of time they have for using their German. Alisa offered the following observations of her children:

> Marisa is a teenager. She doesn't talk to anyone except her girlfriends. Even her guidance counselor says this, but then again she's never been one of these talkative kids. Lukas used to talk all the time but in the last year or so, since he's been in high school, it's hard to get more out of him than grunts and monosyllables. Even when he's hanging out with his friends, they don't talk that much; they make remarks while they're doing something else like watching a movie, playing with their cell

> phones, kicking a ball around, or whatever. He, like Marisa, is a typical teenager. Gregory, on the other hand, is more of a ham and has always loved to go on and on and on. He's also not a teenager yet, and he's the youngest and the one closest to me. (Field notes)

Thus, despite the best efforts of the parents, the HL diminishes because the adolescents' environment is primarily that of the dominant language. While Alicia regularly worked on German reading, writing, and grammar in the early years of the children's schooling, this diminished as the children had more schoolwork to complete and became increasingly involved in extracurricular activities. The children participated in extracurricular activities such as band, sports, and school clubs, and then, when they came home, they had to spend additional time completing homework assignments—all in English.

Peer attitudes, values, and behaviors are central to adolescent and teenage children's lives Giordano, 2003; Haynie & Osgood, 2005). When asked what it means to speak German, Lukas noted: "It annoys me when my friends are there and I have to speak German with my mother. That is impolite since they can't understand." However, Lukas and his mother continue to use German with each other, regardless of where they are and with whom. Here the data reveals the three children's attitudes concerning their HL in the interviews. German is the language to use at home and with their mother; English is the language of dad, school, and peers.

Moreover, as their intellectual knowledge and cognitive abilities developed through school, an ever-increasing gap has arisen between the two languages. Their German, as the mother has noted, is best described as *Haushaltsdeutsch*. It's German of the home or the household. The essential difference between the children's English and German proficiencies is best described by Cummins's (1996) distinction of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). The children have strong BICS in German but lack CALP, especially in writing. In Alisa's words:

> Their German is excellent, but really only in terms of everyday language. When you look at what they write in German, for instance, and compare it to their English, their German pieces are noticeably less sophisticated and more novice-like than their English ones. Of course, the fact that they only get German lessons on Saturdays is part of the problem. If they had the opportunity to be part of a bilingual or dual-immersion program, their formal German, especially their writing, would be much better, but that option doesn't exist for us. The high school doesn't even offer any German as a foreign language. But, at least knowing German as well as they do, they can read it, understand it, and if they want to later, they can find some way of developing their formal German because they at least have the foundations from which to work. (Field notes)

Despite the fact that the children's exposure to German media has lessened, their early exposure contributed greatly to their current abilities in German. If the definition of proficiency is based on daily communicative abilities, there is no question that all three children are bilingual in German and English. They have no problems conversing, reading, exchanging e-mails, or conducting other such activities in German. However, if we expand the definition of *proficient* to encompass the ability to engage fully in academic activities, such as essay writing, analysis, or the like, then there are significant gaps in their abilities between English and German. This is consistent with research that finds that the further removed a generation is from the migration from the home country, the less likely its members are to speak the HL. For the most part, by the third generation, speakers will speak only the dominant language (Alba et al., 2002; Portes & Hao, 1998, 2002). Whether or not this will be the case with Marisa, Lukas, and Gregory is a question that remains open.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Although ideally the educational system would provide for native-language support of immigrants and their descendents, the reality is that this is not the case, despite strong evidence showing the benefits of bilingualism. Thus, this study is of interest to readers concerned about maintaining bilingualism in situations where there is no educational and/or community support. The study is also of interest to those readers who do have such support because it provides insights in how they can encourage bilingualism. It is of further interest to those struggling to maintain their language and heritage in an environment that values assimilation and monolingualism above acculturation and biculturalism.

The study represents an important contribution to the literature on bilingualism in that it provides further evidence that affective variables are critical to HL maintenance. We have examined here some of the more salient sociopsychological factors of bilingualism, delving into the strategies used by the mother to encourage and maintain German in her second-generation children and into the children's perception of their HL and being bilingual. The three children's personal narratives played a major role in understanding their affinity to German. The semistructured interviews in both German and English with each participant established the children's opinions, their feelings, and their attitude towards their HL. Their narratives provide evidence for the personal meaning of bilingualism. The researcher as storyteller added a dimension to the study, which otherwise would have been lost, and brought to the forefront the mother's firsthand knowledge of her children, which would not have surfaced from the interviews alone.

While being bilingual has, without a doubt, myriad advantages, becoming and remaining bilingual is a long and difficult process. The difficulties of fostering and maintaining an HL are compounded the farther away the generations are removed from the home country and culture, and the less the generations live in a natural and supportive linguistic community. Nevertheless, although it is difficult, it is possible to maintain the HL, particularly when one accepts the notion that developing bilingualism is a process that must be consciously supported, reaffirmed, and validated by daily practices and choices. We have seen that it is possible to retain the HL in families, even when there is little or no support from the educational system and/or outside community. Consistent with Cho and Krashen (2000), we see that parental language use, travel to the HL country, and exposure to HL media are critical for HL maintenance. We suggest that these strategies are especially important when there are no bilingual or dual-language education programs available in schools.

In addition, this study has highlighted the importance of affective factors, namely consistent family efforts to develop and encourage positive children's feelings toward the HL and to associate the use of the HL with specific interlocutors. In other words, the family, a socially constructed reality that is defined by the interactions of the members, can be instrumental in promoting and maintaining the HL if the parental practices are consistent, if they promote children's identities as bilingual speakers, and if they actively engage in practices that promote positive attitudes toward the HL and HL speakers. For this family, German remains the preferred (and only) language they use with their mother. All three children have mentioned frequently that they feel strange using English with their mother because "it doesn't feel right," comments indicative of their strong HL ties.

Ideally, of course, the public sector would encourage the maintenance of immigrants' heritage language. Not only in the home, but also in the classroom would heritage languages be supported and developed. This, however, is not the scope of this paper.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN GERMAN AND ENGLISH

(Q1) Wann sprichst du deutsch? Wann sprichst du englisch?
When do you speak German? When do you speak English?

(Q2) Mit wem sprichst du deutsch? Mit wem sprichst du englisch?
With whom do you speak German? With whom do you speak English?

(Q3) Was hältst du davon, dass eure Mama die deutsche Sprache mit euch beibehalten will?
What do you think of your mother wanting you to keep up with the German language?

(Q4) Wie einfach oder wie schwierig ist es, dich auf deutsch auszudrücken?
How easy or how difficult is it to express yourself in German?

(Q5) Was bedeutet es für dich, deutsch zu sprechen?
What does it mean to you to speak German?

(Q6) Was bedeutet es für dich, deutsch sprechen zu können?
What does it mean to you to be able to speak German?

(Q7) Sprichst du gerne deutsch? Mit wem? Wann?
Do you like to speak German? With whom? When?

(Q8) Liest du auf deutsch? Wann? Was?
Do you read in German? When? What?

(Q9) Erzähl' mir was du vom deutschsprechen hältst.
Tell me what you think about speaking German.

(Q10) Gib mir 3 Adjektive, die für dich das deutschsprechen beschreiben.
Give me 3 adjectives that describe speaking German for you.

(Q11) Bist du gerne in Deutschland? Warum/warum nicht?
Do you like being in Germany? Why/why not?

(Q12) Möchtest du gerne wieder nach Deutschland?
Would you like to visit Germany again?

(Q13) Hast du Vorteile gegenüber deinen Freunden, die nur eine Sprache zu Hause sprechen?
Do you have advantages over your friends who only speak one language at home?

(Q14) Welche Vorteile hast du?
What advantages do you have?

(Q15) Haben deine Geschwister die selben Vorteile?
Do your siblings have the same advantages?

(Q16) Hast du Freunde, die auch eine andere Sprache zu Hause sprechen?
Do you have friends who also speak another language at home?

(Q17) Wer? Welche Sprache?
Who? What language?

(Q18) Sprichst du mit deinen Freunden über Deutschland?
Do you speak with your friends about Germany?

(Q19) Mit deinen Geschwistern?
With your siblings?

(Q20) Mit deinem Vater?
With your father?

(Q21) Unterhältst du dich zu Hause mehr mit Mama oder Vater?
Do you talk more with your mother or your father at home?

(Q22) Worüber?
About what?

(Q23) Wie du noch klein warst, mit wem hast du dich mehr unterhalten, mit Mama oder Vater?
When you were still little, with whom did you talk more, with your mother or your father?

(Q24) Hast du sonst noch was zu erzählen? Sprichst du deutsch sehr gut oder nicht so gut oder mittelmässig oder ausgezeichnet?
Do you have anything else to say? Do you speak German very good or not so good, or average or excellent?

(Q25) Und wieviel Prozent sprichst du deutsch und wieviel englisch zu Hause wenn 100% das Höchste wäre?
And what percent do you speak German and what percent English at home if 100% were the highest?