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SOCIALIZATION OF LANGUAGE THROUGH FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY: A CASE STUDY

Challenges of heritage language maintenance and benefits of bilingualism have been widely acknowledged. Heritage language maintenance research most often focuses on heritage languages in English-dominant societies. This paper presents a case study on family language policy experiences, strategies, and outcomes led by an American-born mother in her effort to maintain and promote English, her heritage language, within the home in the Hebrew-dominant environment in Israel.

Key words: bilingualism, heritage language maintenance, family language policy, socio-linguistics

Introduction

Much of the research on the influence of background factors on language maintenance and bilingual development has been conducted with bilingual children where one of the languages is English, present study included (Paradis, 2010; Hoff, 2006), however, the focus has mostly been on English as the target and majority language. Few studies have focused on English as a heritage language (HL) (De Houwer, 1985; Lanza, 1997), and even fewer on English as a HL in Israel (Lewine, 1987; Kayam & Hirsch, 2012, 2013). To our knowledge, the present study is the first of its kind, focusing on English as a HL in Israel as viewed through the experiences of a single-family unit utilizing a Family Language Policy (FLP) lens. English in this role, like other heritage languages, relies mainly on the interplay between family investment and transmission techniques and support

of the host community. Although in many families the heritage language is lost altogether by the third generation, there are families who successfully maintain their heritage languages and promote bilingualism. Toman (1993) postulates 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 (5).” Specifically, primary caregiver input, sibling, and peer input were among those found to be the most influential (De Houwer, 2000). As such, in order to investigate HL maintenance and bilingual development one must turn to FLPs first and foremost, followed by investigations of the level of community support. Recurring support for the family’s critical role in HL maintenance and bilingual development, regardless of official, top-down policies, supports our view (Garrett et al., 2003; Baker, 1995; Hakuta & D’Andrea, 1992). The present study provides a significant contribution to the field by investigating primary caregiver-led FLP and its evolution through time, as children grew up and language socialization occurred.

Family language policy

The field of language policy examines beliefs and ideologies about language, language practices, and efforts to influence language practices through various management techniques (Spolsky, 2004) focused on official top-down policies stemming from the politics of specific regions at a particular point in time. More recently, the importance and inclusion of investigations of bottom-up policies through family language policy investigations, among others, has been recognized and research stimulated. There are different language policy domains, one of which is the family domain. As such, language policy components including practice, ideology, and management, as well as beliefs of active participants regarding language choice are present and can be meaningfully investigated within the family domain (Spolsky, 2012). In bilingual and HL maintenance research a prevailing finding points to the importance of FLP components, more specifically parents’ use of language within the home and their involvement in creating and locating outside opportunities and extracurricular activities in their HL in determining success in maintaining a HL and raising bilingual children (Schechter et al., 1995; Cho & Krashen, 2000).

Language socialization

Language socialization is a naturally occurring, dynamic process that accompanies changes in linguistic settings and that extends throughout the lifespan. It is divided into two foci: socialization through use of language and socialization to use language (Schiefflin & Ochs, 1986; Bayley & Schechter, 2003). As such, when a family enters a new linguistic variety there is an interplay or negotiation of language socialization between the parents and the children, depending on the needs of each individual and their command of the language(s) in question.

It is a process of negotiating FLP based on the needs and desires of each of the participants: family members.

English in Israel

For a language to achieve the status of a world or global language it "...has to be taken up by other countries around the world. They must decide to give it a special place within their communities, even though they may have few (or no) mother tongue speakers (Crystal, 2003)." English has reached this status. It is widely desired, used, and learned in much of the world, Israel included. Although English speakers are often hosts to a linguistically and culturally diverse influx of immigrants, with high levels of immigration occurring in the USA for example, Israel is unique in that it attracts a relatively large number of English-speaking immigrants, among others. In multicultural and multilingual societies, such as the USA and Israel, research has focused on HL maintenance efforts and outcomes of different linguistic communities. While all immigrant groups face difficulties in maintaining their HL, having been removed from their "natural communities (in this case the mother) (Schechter et al., 1999)," some are more or less supported by the host community. In Israel, English is highly regarded. It is the language of business, science, research, and communication between different linguistic communities who are not fluent in Hebrew. It is part of Israel's education curriculum from as early as the first grade in some areas, in others from grade four, but unofficially it is sought after as early as possible, particularly in the country's urban areas. Much of a student's success in school and higher education is determined by their mastery of the English language. English is assessed throughout schooling through standardized national tests, such as the Meitzav exam, which is administered in elementary school in the 5th grade and again in middle school in the 8th grade. It is one of seven subjects required and assessed for matriculation from high school, through the Bagrut exam. These two national tests (Meitzav and Bagrut) and their format and content are 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).

For acceptance into one of the country's universities, students are once again tested with the Psychometric Entrance Test (PET) in English among other subjects. This is a high-stakes test on which admission to university is heavily weighed. It is administered by the Israeli National Institute for Testing and Evaluation (NITE), much like the SAT, a standardized test for university admissions in the USA. In order to apply to graduate school, immigrants in Israel are tested on Hebrew and English knowledge. Should immigrants perform below the requirement, they are required to enroll in special courses prior to commencing their graduate studies. At the universities, in both undergraduate and graduate studies, high-level English language proficiency is a necessity. In many courses,

students are expected to learn from and read international English textbooks and research articles as part of the class curriculum. Furthermore, much of the job market requires its workers to be proficient in English to varying degrees depending on the job, position, etc. Some go as far as seeking candidates with command of English at native or near-native speaker level.

Although not an official language of the State of Israel, the status of English is communicated on many levels. It is part of the education system and it is also witnessed throughout Israel in Linguistic Landscape examinations. English signage is everywhere, from street signs, public office signs, to shop signs, etc. As Linguistic Landscape (LL) examines representations of different linguistic groups in public spaces, uncovering the de-facto policies and symbolic representations of different linguistic groups within a single space and time (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Ben-Rafael et al., 2004; Kayam, Hirsch, & Galily, 2012), it communicates acceptance, welcome, and embracing of English and its speakers. As such, the Israeli community can be viewed as supportive of HL maintenance efforts by the English-speaking immigrants within its borders.

Present study

Based on the research cited above, this study focuses on and presents the findings of a case study exploring FLP components of different active participants within the family domain. Although social and educational policies in Israel support bilingual and HL development and maintenance in English, environmental pressures of immigrants removed from their natural community are present and evident. The purpose of this case study was to investigate the FLP components of a bilingual, English-Hebrew mother and the attitudes of the active participants, the children. The father was not interviewed due to the focus of the current study on bilingual primary caregiver-led FLP. It is an example of language socialization processes and outcomes within a single family unit, but which can be viewed as representative of many similarly oriented immigrant and expat families around the world.

Method

Participants

The family interviewed for the present study includes six members: the mother, Debbie, and five children: Tal, a 22-year-old male, Ben, a 20-year-old male, Alex, a 20-year-old female, Etai, a 15-year-old boy, and Roy, a 14-year-old boy. The mother was born in the USA, and the father and all of the five children were born and raised in Israel. They have been living in one of Tel Aviv's more affluent neighborhoods in which both parents and children place high importance on education and, specifically, English language education and proficiency. Many children are provided native English speaking tutors as early as 3 years

old, some earlier, and at the onset of primary school years most children have extracurricular English tutoring in either one-on-one or small group settings.

The mother

Debbie was born to an Israeli mother and an American father in the USA. She lived in the USA most of her childhood, although she did live in Israel for five years between the ages of 6 and 11. She returned to Israel 28 years ago where she met her husband and had her five children. Debbie completed most of her schooling in the USA, apart from the five years she spent in Israel as a child. She attended university in the USA where she completed her BA and MA degrees. Debbie is an English teacher and an EFL assessment writer in Israel. During her childhood she grew up in an English-speaking home. She reports, however, that during the time spent in Israel, her sister and she spoke Hebrew with each other. Once back in the USA, they switched back into English. Her sister currently lives in California, USA, and the two sisters speak to each other exclusively in English. In Israel, Debbie works in English and uses English with “some friends who are American,” and her children. She is fluent in Hebrew, and speaks it with her husband and her Israeli friends and family. Debbie reports reading mostly in English, although if she is interested in a book written by a Hebrew author, she reads it in Hebrew and not the translated version.

The father

Debbie’s husband is an Israeli. An exchange between him and Debbie and the children is exclusively in Hebrew. Debbie reports feeling supported by her husband in her attempts to speak and impart English language onto their children. She also views the quest for English language development and maintenance with her children as her own, being the native English speaker and primary caregiver to the children during childhood.

The children

As mentioned above, three of the children are in their 20s. Two of them are currently in the army (mandatory in the State of Israel), and the oldest one just moved to San Francisco, California. Roy (14 years old) is in the 8th grade and Etai (15 years old) is in the 9th grade. All of the children attended/attend schools in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Data collection

A semi-structured interview was created and was based largely on the tool created and used by DeCapua and Wintergerst (2009). The interviews were conducted over a period of 3 weeks in March 2013. Interviews with the children were conducted at their home, while the interview with the mother took place outside of the home. All of the interviews were recorded and took 30–45 minutes

to complete. All of the questions were asked in English and participants were not instructed to answer in one of the two languages. The choice of language use was recorded.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers and subsequently categorized according to the themes: mother's strategies and motivations in encouraging the learning and maintenance of English by the children, children's attitudes and feelings toward English language use and the actual language during the interview.

Findings

Mother's motivations, strategies, and reflections

Although it was very important for Debbie to encourage the learning and maintenance of English with her children, her initial one parent, one language rule deteriorated over the years. She explains: "I speak English to my kid and they answer me mostly in Hebrew, because they know that I know Hebrew... Hebrew has been a big part of their lives." When asked to elaborate on her English/Hebrew language use with her children and the evolution of change in her language use she explains that she uses Hebrew "...especially when there are other people around. The older kids started bringing Hebrew into the home... because they were in schools; they spoke Hebrew with their friends, and amongst themselves, the siblings." Debbie reports that her English language use decreased from the beginning of motherhood: "It decreased, or it is more like the Hebrew increased. I find myself sitting with them (the children) and their friends a lot so obviously I will speak in Hebrew with them...and sometimes my kids will even say 'Mom, why are you speaking in Hebrew?' of course they will say it in Hebrew, but that's strange to them." When asked in retrospect if and what she would change about her language use with her children she explains, "If I could, I would work harder on trying to have them answer me in English, whether if it would be me pretending not to know Hebrew so well...I think it would have helped them. I think their English would have been even more fluent. The thing is, when Tal was born, my oldest, the first thing he heard, the beginning of his life was in English, until he went to preschool, and until he started socializing with other kids he spoke to us in English, because I was at home all day with them, English was really their main language. Then as they grow up and as more children come into the family and they start speaking Hebrew, English sort of faded, other than me. The older kids started bringing Hebrew into the home, because they were in schools, they spoke Hebrew with their friends, and amongst themselves (the siblings)." When asked to discuss her children's level of English, Debbie thinks that the oldest, Tal has the strongest command of English

and the most native-like accent. “Tal’s English is really the best and he is the oldest, and then it progresses downwards, although they all speak English really well. Even accent-wise, Tal’s accent is better. Tal sounds American and then it tapers down. I think it has to do with exposure. Tal spent more summers in the States, he went to summer camp in the States and then by the time Roy and Etai reached the age of summer camp, the older kids had scouts and their lives and we didn’t want to go as much. When they were little, the older ones, I was in the States every summer for two months. They were going to camp on a school bus every day, the whole bit. They lived like Americans.” In order to support her children’s English language learning, Debbie felt that it was important to provide extracurricular English lessons to all of her children. “I always found that when I tried to sit with them on workbooks that I would bring from the States that it didn’t work. It is really hard for me to teach my kids. So, with me they got the natural English and of course I would help them but it was never good when I tried to teach them. So, I brought in somebody to teach them once a week for an hour, things that didn’t have anything to do with what they were doing in school. It was there to better their spoken English and reading. For example, Tal had a very nice group and they did everything in English. The interaction was in English, and this went on for years. Ben and Alex were in a different program, but all of them had it, have it.”

Husband

Debbie’s husband is an Israeli. He was born and raised in Israel and communicates primarily in Hebrew. Debbie and her husband always spoke Hebrew with each other. When asked about his stance on the family language policy, Debbie explains: “My husband would say: ‘Why do you speak to them in English?’ but it was always important to me to speak to them in English. Sometimes he thought that maybe they (the children) don’t understand me so well, maybe they are embarrassed, but I think he’s happy. He knows the importance of it, plus his English got much better.”

Tal

Tal is the oldest child in the family. He was 22 years old at the time of the interview, post mandatory three-year army service in Israel. Shortly after the interview, Tal moved to San Francisco, California for studies. During the interview, Tal responded to all questions in English. When asked about his English language usage he explains that he uses his English when he is outside of Israel, with people who don’t know Hebrew, his grandfather who lives in the United States, and his mother. Tal agrees with his mother’s desire to maintain English, stating that it is “very important. It’s easier for me to get around when abroad, it’s very good for me, especially when I am traveling...and moving to San Francisco!” Tal explains that he enjoys speaking English and that it is not difficult for him to

express himself in English, but that it is “not the same as Hebrew.” He also reports reading fiction and non-fiction books in English occasionally. Tal believes that his siblings and he have the same advantages over their friends who don’t speak another language at home, and he limits it to English. He explains, “I speak better English than them!” When asked to give three adjectives that describe speaking English for him he selects “important, useful, and helpful.” When asked whether he wished he could have gone to an English-only school, his answer is “yes.”

Ben and Alex

Ben and Alex are 20-year-old twins. They are currently in the mandatory army service in Israel. Although both Ben and Alex answered in English, they did code-switch between Hebrew and English several times. They both report speaking English to their grandfather and mother. Ben adds that he does not use his English much. When asked to reflect on their mother’s desire for them to know and maintain their English, both report positive attitudes. Ben: “I think it’s good. I think that people should know English well (in Hebrew).” Alex responds in English: “It’s good, I am glad that I know it so well, it’s easy, everyone is jealous.” When asked how easy or difficult it is for them to express themselves in English, both Ben and Alex report feeling comfortable in expressing themselves in English, but that they find it easier in Hebrew. When asked to provide three adjectives that describe speaking English to them, Alex says that it is important, interesting, and complicated, while Ben selects smart, important, and fun. Ben elaborates by saying that “It’s my other language. I am proud that I know English. It’s important to speak English because it is an international language.” Both Ben and Alex report not reading much in English. When asked whether they feel that they have advantages over their friends who speak only one language, both of their responses are English specific. Ben: “Yeah, of course...that I speak English better than them. American passport.” Alex: “Yes, of course. That I know English, it’s an international language. It’s an important language to know well.” They both think that their siblings had the same advantages as themselves and they both report having friends who speak a second language at home. When asked if they wish they could have gone to an English-only school, Alex is unsure but reflects by stating “It would have been easier for me.” Ben’s initial response is affirmative, but he quickly recants by saying: “Yeah, no, no...I like the schools I went to.”

Etai

At the time of the interview, Etai was 15 years old and in the 9th grade in one of the high schools in Tel Aviv, Israel. Etai answered all of the questions in Hebrew, and code-switched into English in several instances with a single English word or phrase pertaining to the answer. Etai reports speaking English during his English lessons at school, when he is abroad, and with his mother. When

asked what he thinks about his parents wanting him to keep up with English, Etai simply says that it is “important, of course it is important.” When asked how easy or difficult it is for him to express himself in English, he responds: “It’s pretty easy but not as easy as in Hebrew (in Hebrew).” When asked what it means to him to speak in English, Etai focuses on the feelings, in his words: “When I speak English I feel like I am different than everyone else...it feels good.” However, when asked whether he likes speaking English, Etai’s response is quite negative: “Not really, I don’t like to speak it with an accent.” In order to clarify what he meant he switched to English and with a pronounced American accent added “international.” Like his siblings Etai is asked what he thinks of speaking English, as well as to provide three adjectives that describe speaking English to him. Etai responds in Hebrew, just as he did throughout the interview, stating that it is “important...it’s worth it for me to know it.” The three adjectives he provides are: “useful, helpful, and interesting.” When asked about whether he likes visiting America and whether he would like to visit again, Etai switches into English and responds positively: “Yeah, it’s fun there...the family,” and “of course I want to visit again.” He believes he has an advantage over his friends due to his English knowledge and is not sure whether his siblings have the same advantage, responding with an unsure “I think so” in English. When asked about his mother’s use of English, Etai reports that Debbie always speaks to him in English, except when she is angry and when there are other people around. When asked whether he wishes he could have gone to an English speaking school, he responds with a simple “no” in Hebrew.

Roy

Roy is the youngest in the family. He was 14 years old at the time of the interview and was attending 8th grade in a local Tel Aviv middle school. During the interview Roy code-switched often, answering some of the questions in English, while others in Hebrew. Roy reports not speaking much English, “not much... with mom sometimes, and with my friend, he is from the U.S.” He reports speaking mostly Hebrew to his family, and English “sometimes with my mom.” When asked whether his mother speaks English to him and when he speaks English, Roy reports Debbie speaking English to him all the time, while he speaks back to her “in Hebrew, all the time.” He goes on to explain that he uses his English with his grandfather and cousins who live in the USA, but that while in summer camp in the USA he also spoke mainly Hebrew, and “...sometimes in English.” Roy reports not reading in English, other than for the book reports required for his English class at school. Roy’s attitude is positive toward English. He reports enjoying speaking English, particularly with his friends from the USA. He thinks English is important and needed. He chooses “important, funny, and fun” as three adjectives that describe speaking English to him, although initially he didn’t understand what an adjective was, until it was translated into Hebrew. When asked

how easy or difficult it is for him to express himself in English, Roy explains, “not so difficult but also not easy, because I have a big vocabulary, but not too big...there are words that are difficult for me to find.” When asked whether he would like to visit the USA again, he answers in the affirmative and adds that he wants to “move and live in the U.S.” When asked whether he thinks he has an advantage over his friends who don’t speak another language, Roy explains, “Yes! Ken (yes in Hebrew)...that I don’t have an accent in English, almost, and that I can speak more easily.” He believes that his siblings have the same advantages. When asked whether he wished he could go to an English speaking school, Roy simply answers “yes.”

Discussion

Debbie’s FLP planning occurred naturally, it was important to her for her children to speak her language, English. She did not consult professionals, literature, or friends and family regarding this choice. This finding is in line with the FLP planning of English-speaking immigrants in Israel (as can be seen in Kayam and Hirsch, 2012). Her initial FLP management strategies included the one parent/one language principle (Dopke, 1992), providing extracurricular, after-school English classes with a native English teacher for her children, and maximization of exposure to native-speaking English environments through summer camps in the USA and frequent visits to the USA. With the birth of more children, and as the children became active socializing agents (see Burns, 1984; Cardozo-Freeman, 1975; de la Piedra & Romo, 2003; Schieffelin, 1986), Debbie was faced with the pressures present in HL communities removed from their natural community (Schechter et al., 1996).

As children enter schools that do not support the HL maintenance or development actively, and as peers become increasingly more important in children’s lives, a sharp decline in HL fluency is noted (Cummins, 1991; Portes & Hao, 2002). Although initially she found it natural and easy to communicate with her first-born exclusively in English, as he entered a Hebrew-speaking preschool the prevalence of Hebrew use became increasingly more common within the home. She found herself speaking Hebrew when her children’s friends were around, and Tal, the oldest, began asserting his FLP stance by communicating with his siblings in Hebrew. As could be suspected, this was the beginning of the domino effect, with an increase of Hebrew use within the home, acceptance of the children’s choice to respond to Debbie in Hebrew, and established Hebrew use between the siblings. Consequently, although all the children felt connected to English, albeit to different degrees, and although they expressed an understanding of the importance of English language knowledge, the degree of bilingualism declined in each additional child. Although all of the children saw themselves as bilingual and proficient in English, all but the first-born chose to answer most of the

interview questions in Hebrew. As mentioned above, this finding is also in line with previous findings, and can be explained through 'language shyness' that later-born children experience in relation to heritage language use (see Krashen, 1998). They view their English knowledge as an advantage over their peers and do not recognize each other's different degrees of knowledge, command, or comfort with it. Supportive of previous research, we learned that Tal, Ben, Alex, Etai, and Roy recognized the advantages and practical applications of English language knowledge and bilingualism (De Capua & Wintergerst, 2009). More so, they seemed to have internalized their mother's stance toward the importance of English language knowledge, as supported by Israeli society. Their use and level of comfort with it declined according to birth order. This finding supports previous research findings, pointing to different experiences of first-born and later-born children's early linguistic experiences and consequent outcomes (see Barton & Tomasello, 1994; Ely & Berko Gleason, 1995; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998; Shin, 2002).

In evaluating her children's English language abilities, Debbie was well aware of the birth order effects in terms of use, command, and accent. Her regret lies in her less than strict adherence to the one language/one parent (OPOL) principle, her increasing use of Hebrew, and her acceptance of child initiated change in the FLP.

Despite her regrets, and the decline of English language use in the home and with each child, Debbie's children are all proficient in English and this is thanks to her continued struggle to maintain it within the home, and the early exposure that she provided. In the sociolinguistic research it is well known that by the third generation, most would abandon their HL and become largely monolingual in the dominant language (Portes & Hao, 2002, and others). As things currently stand, Debbie's first-born has relocated to California for an indefinite amount of time. This early connection that was made through exclusive use of English within the home, and perhaps more importantly in this regard, through the experiences and memories built through summer camps in the USA, has brought Tal to the USA. This is consistent with the findings of Cho and Krashen (2000) and DeCapua and Witergerst (2009), which identify parental language use and visits to the HL country among the most important in HL maintenance. It will be interesting to follow up and see how their differing experiences based on birth order affect their future families' FLPs.

The present study provides a significant contribution to the field of heritage language maintenance. It is the first case study (to our knowledge) to investigate (FLP) efforts in maintaining English as a heritage language in Israel. It also points to the English language's lack of immunity from the challenges and difficulties faced by other languages in HL maintenance role and efforts. Speakers may be aware of the status of English on a global scale, but their personal experiences (or lack thereof) affect their knowledge and comfort levels in using and therefore further developing their proficiency in English.

Although a single-case study, the current study also provides a significant contribution to the still scarce research on FLP. It provides an in-depth look into one family's experiences in bilingual primary caregiver-led FLP, the outcomes in terms of language proficiency in children, and points to the need for more research on practical tools which can be utilized by immigrant parents in their efforts to support heritage language maintenance in multiple-children homes, taking into consideration the birth order effects and language socialization that is imminent.

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