

Te Espero: Varying Child Bilingual Abilities and the Effects on Dynamics in Mexican Immigrant Families

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This paper offers a closer examination of the effects of an English-dominant society on bilingual abilities by looking at everyday family dynamics in Mexican immigrant families. Three immigrant families from Mexico currently residing in Northern California provided the data for this project through ten hours of audio recordings documenting their normal home interactions. A qualitative analysis of family interactions shows that while the youngest children are proficient in the dominant language of the society they live in, they experience a far greater degree of difficulty with bilingualism than do their older siblings. This difficulty leads to heritage language avoidance with their parents and a weakening of family interaction. As a result, middle children find it necessary to take it upon themselves to act as translators within the family in an effort to maintain cohesive family dynamics.

Introduction

Communication is not always easy between children and their parents due to a generation gap and accompanying language change. This becomes even more difficult when the boundary becomes more than just age-related. Children of immigrant parents know these difficulties firsthand, as they usually have to juggle two or more languages every day. Most of the time these children become extremely proficient in the language they use with their peers and in the classroom. The question then arises: What happens to family dynamics when the peer language replaces the immigrant family's native language? This project aims to answer this question by comparing children's Spanish language abilities in relation to family dynamics in three Mexican immigrant families.

Many linguists have examined the differing bilingual abilities within Mexican immigrant families. They have looked at the effects of the school system on the degree of fluency for school-age children as well as the motivation for acquisition of English due to parental encouragement (e.g. Valdés, 2003).

As children of immigrant families in California, all the adolescents involved in this study have been fully immersed in the mandatory English-only school system. Vasquez et al. write about the benefit of second language acquisition which takes place in the school system for the children of Mexican immigrant families:

Once in school, they start learning English and gain enough knowledge of Anglo culture so that they are well on the road to becoming bilingual and bi-cultural... Their eclectic knowledge and skills, in turn, contribute to the children's ability to act as valuable resources for their families by helping them to negotiate an unfamiliar language and culture, (Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994, p. 80).

The cross-linguistic abilities of bilingual children are praised by Mexican communities, and the school system is a readily available way for them to gain these abilities. Therefore, parents of Mexican children encourage their English involvement in school. As a result, the children become further immersed in the everyday use of English, which is the most common language in the schools among peers. This can, and often does, lead to a language shift among the children so that their preferred language becomes English (e.g. Brenneman, Morris & Israeli, 2007). Therefore, even though they may accommodate their language use for their parents, the children themselves prefer to use English with each other.

Bilingual children's use of Spanish within the home despite their preference for English can be explained via the accommodation theory. Giles and Coupland explain this theory as follows:

...Accommodation is to be seen as a multiply-organized and contextually complex set of alternatives, regularly available to communicators in face-to-face talk. It can function to index and achieve solidarity with or dissociation from a conversational partner, reciprocally and dynamically (Giles & Coupland, 1991, pp. 60-61).

Since their parents are native Spanish speakers, and in some cases monolingual Spanish speakers, the children use Spanish around them as a sign of their goodwill. Through this practice, they are reinforcing the familial bonds and solidarity in their home.

The degree to which the children are able to accommodate, however, is heavily influenced by the treatment of language within the home. Schecter and Bayley (2002) discuss this as they look at "the important relation between home language practices and the development of bilingual and biliterate abilities among linguistic minority children" (25). They are able to make significant conclusions

about the direct effects of the level of practice and support of minority languages in the home on bilingual abilities of the minority children living there. The more a family utilizes and enforces the minority language, the more proficient the children are in it.

Discoveries such as these have led to the development of guidebooks for parents on how to support bilingualism in their children. Colin Baker (2000) provides information on bilingualism to both teachers and parents while incorporating cultural concepts. Cunningham-Andersson (2004) writes specifically to parents about ways they can assist their children in becoming bilingual and retaining fluency in both languages. Going even one step further, the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a guidebook suggesting ways parents can help implement programs to strengthen bilingual abilities in the schools (1976). The parental role in the development of bilingualism in children has become a popular topic in the linguistics community. The effects of these varying degrees of bilingualism specifically on family dynamics, however, have not been targeted for investigation.

The purpose of this article is to take the popular discussion of home bilingual development and look at the other side to see the effects the English language schooling system has on Spanish speaking families. Once parents employ (or abstain from) the varying methods recommended to improve bilingualism, it is not known what effect is had on the family as a whole. This project looks at conversations and language use within three Mexican immigrant households, each with children of differing bilingual abilities. I first examine child accommodation to the parental preference for Spanish, in which the children's Spanish language abilities are revealed, as are their parents' treatment of these abilities. I then look at the children's preference for English with each other as well as the frequency with which and contexts in which these exchanges take place. Finally, I examine the implications of a lack of Spanish language fluency found in the youngest members of two of the families. This all leads to my conclusion that a lack of Spanish language proficiency is detrimental to family dynamics in Mexican immigrant households.

Data and Methodology

The data for this paper was gathered through audio recordings of three Mexican immigrant families living in the same working class neighborhood in Northern California. The families were chosen based on their answers to a survey, which was distributed in two general education sixth-grade classrooms at the same public primary school. All of the children surveyed were deemed fully proficient in the English language by this school. For this research, only sixth-

grade students were chosen because by this point, it is likely they have been fully immersed in the English-only school system, and they may have older or younger siblings with English and Spanish language experiences different from their own. I looked for students who identified themselves as native Spanish speakers with acquired English skills belonging to a fairly recent immigrant family and having at least one monolingual Spanish-speaking parent. The surveys were completely voluntary, as was any additional information they chose to give.

After five families were selected from this initial process, four consented, and the elementary school approved three of them: families of two twelve-year-old girls and one twelve-year-old boy. At this time, the three sixth-grade students chosen for the study were given an audio recorder and asked to turn it on in a room at their home frequently occupied by most members of the family when these members were present at the same time, e.g., family dinnertime. Each student was told to follow this procedure twice, for an hour each time. Finally, the students were asked to return the audio recordings on the device to their teacher, who then returned the recordings to me.

After the data collection, I listened to the full recordings from each student and identified instances of English and Spanish use by the target students with their siblings. I then transcribed these and compared the transcript with each family's background information given in the survey. The resulting analysis is a compilation of background information provided by the three families I worked with, my personal experience with Mexican immigrant families, and a great deal of research. This analysis served to support my findings that in the families studied, the target children accommodate both their parents' preference for Spanish and their siblings' preference for English in an attempt to maintain cohesive family dynamics, especially when communication breakdowns are present stemming from the youngest family members' lack of Spanish language ability.

Analysis

Child accommodation to parental preference for Spanish

Jasmine. Throughout the data, Spanish is generally the preferred language in any conversation involving at least one of the parents. In two of the three families, Spanish was in fact the only language spoken to the children, regardless of what language the children were using. This is not the result of a lack of English language knowledge, however, for the data show that most of the parents understood at least most of the English spoken around them. An instance of this is shown in Example 1 when Jasmine's mother is responding to her children's English comments made about an English language movie they are all watching. Before the children accommodate her preference for Spanish, Jasmine's mother responds to their English

discussion in lines 9 and 10, thus displaying an understanding of what they just said. After she speaks, they change their conversation to Spanish and continue using this language until silence at the end of the example.

Example 1: Jasmine and her siblings use accommodation towards their mother

J: Jasmine; M: mother; S: sister; B: brother

((Movie is playing in the background))

1 B: It's just a dream,

2 fool.

3 S: No,

4 aquí,

here,

5 it'[s a vision].

6 J: [It's a vision!]

7 B: Oh, is it?

8 S: Yea:h.

9 M: Ella estaba pensando

She was thinking

10 en to[₂do eso?]

about all that?

11 S: [₂Ella] e[₃staba—

She was—

12 y los todos esos—]

and all of them—

13 J: [₃Es una visión].

It's a vision.

14 B: [₃Oh, es que era la #]

Oh, it's because she was the #

15 S: Y los todos estos,

And all of them,

16 [₄se iban] a morir.

they were going to die.

17 J: [₄Son—]

They are—

18 S: ..[₅Todos.]

All.

19 M: [₅Por qué?]

Why?

20 S: No dice.

It doesn't say.

21 Ella—

She—

22 B: Porque ella [₆lo vió ##].

Because she [saw it ##].

23 S: [₆porque ella lo vió:]

because she saw it.

24 M: Oh.

<T=17.25 seconds>

The children's conversation in the beginning of this example is almost entirely in English, displaying their preference for English with each other. However, when their mother questions them in Spanish in line 10, her asserted preference for this language actually causes the children to switch to Spanish to answer her question and even continue their conversation in Spanish to accommodate their mother. The children are all fluent in Spanish and use this language accommodation in lines 11 through 23 to reaffirm their solidarity with their mother. By switching to Spanish to talk about a movie which is in English, all three of her children are expressing their good will towards her.

In a later conversation, Jasmine's parents put emphasis on their preference for Spanish when Jasmine's nephew, who has trouble with Spanish and speaks almost entirely in English, joins the family in playing a board game.

Example 2: Jasmine's family expresses a preference for Spanish to her nephew

J: Jasmine; M: Jasmine's mother; F: father; S: sister; B: brother; N: Jasmine's nephew

((Game is in play, and it is the nephew's turn))

1 M: Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis.

One, two, three, four, five, six.

2 [Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, [₂seis]].

One, two, three, four, five, six.

3 S: [Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, [₂seis]].

One, two, three, four, five, six.

4 J: [₂Y ya].

That's it.

5 F: =Dale.

Go.

6 M: =Dale mi[₃jo].

Go mijo ((term of endearment))

7 S: [3Y:]

And

8 con que no [4te] [5caiga] dos.

as long as you don't get a two.

9 N: [4Qué?]

What?

10 F: [5Dale!]

Go!

11 M: =No te caiga dos.

Don't get a two.

12 F: [6Dale!]

Go!

13 M: [6Da:]le!

Go!

14 N,

15 dale!

Go!

16 J: =Dale!

Go!

17 F: =Da[le!]

Go!

18 S: [Ya!]

Go!

19 Sú:vele:.

Go up.

((N follows the command and the game continues))

<T=13.25 seconds>

As Example 2 illustrates, the nephew does not understand his grandmother's simple command in line 6, thus leading him to abruptly ask her what was said in line 9. This entire conversation is in Spanish, including the nephew's question.

However, as *qué* is an extremely common and well-known Spanish question word, it should be expected that the nephew would know it, as he is a member of a Spanish-speaking family. Therefore, his use of this word does not guarantee his understanding of the Spanish language, and he in fact uses this question word because he is unable to understand what Jasmine's mother has just said to him. His question cannot be in response to the sister's statement in lines 7 and 8 because he overlaps with her just after she begins her sentence, suggesting that his question pertains to the sentence before, in line 6. Furthermore, immediately after

he asks this question, Jasmine's father repeats in line 10 what the mother just said, which indicates that he interprets the question as responding to the mother's turn.

As a result of the nephew's question, Jasmine, her father, and her sister repeat her mother's command with force in lines 12 through 18. Rather than translating it into English to assist him in understanding, they instead repeat the Spanish command again and again, with the sister adding a supplementary command in line 19. Even in this short example, the language barrier between the nephew and Jasmine's mother is apparent. In this example, the family clearly asserts that they will not accommodate to his English preference at this time, but rather he will have to accommodate to the Spanish speech of Jasmine's mother, which he seems to be willing to do even when he does not understand. In choosing to speak Spanish over English, they are displaying their closer ties to the cultural group and ethnicity of their mother than to that of the nephew and the dominant United States society (Holmes, 2001, p. 175).

The lack of translation or any other form of linguistic assistance for the nephew does not help him understand what is said. Rather, the repetition of the command makes him understand what he is to do at that moment. While this approach may help him understand generally what is expected of him at that moment, it does not assist in a literal understanding of his grandmother's Spanish, and it makes possible (and very likely) further comprehension problems in the future.

Oscar. Reinforcement of the Spanish language also takes place in Oscar's home, with special attention paid to correct usage. Throughout the data from his family, Oscar uses Spanish when directly speaking to his mother in all instances except one. Twice in the data, she corrects his Spanish. In Example 3, Oscar's mother subtly corrects his Spanish in a casual conversation involving desired portion servings for breakfast.

Example 3: Oscar's mother corrects his word choice

O: Oscar; M: mother; F: father

((Talking about food servings for breakfast))

1 F: [#####].

2 O: [Un poco].

A little.

3 M: Qué?

What?

4 O: Poco.

Little.

5 M: Poquita?

A little?

6 O: M:hm..

<T=3.5 seconds>

Here the mother actually gives Oscar a chance to fix his language on his own when she asks what he said in line 3. However, when he repeats the same word, *poco*, she corrects him in line 5, and he affirms her correction in line 6. This other-initiated repair (McLaughlin, 1984) allows him to practice grammatical Spanish-language recall, while maintaining Spanish communication with his mother.

Later during the same conversation, Oscar is still speaking to his mother about breakfast, but this time he is repeating to her that which he had previously stated about his breakfast. In Example 4, Oscar knows the word he wants to use, but he experiences a speech breakdown when he cannot remember how to correctly say the word due to a lack of Spanish language proficiency. Other-initiated repair is used by his mother again here to strengthen his bilingualism.

Example 4: Oscar's mother assists him in word pronunciation

O: Oscar; M: mother

((Talking about what Oscar already asked for for breakfast))

1 O: Dije

I said

2 estre—

3 Dije estrellados pero luego dije,

I said sunny-side-up but then I said,

4 ah no mejor, oh no

rather,

5 le-

6 levuer-

7 le- (BLEH)

8 revuer:tos

9 M: Re-

10 revue:ltos.

scrambled.

11 O: =That.

<T=8.75 seconds>

After four attempts at saying *revueltos* in lines 5 through 8, he settles on a form on the final attempt, *revuertos*, but it is incorrect. His mother then corrects him in line 10, and to this he hastily responds in English in line 11.

Given Oscar's difficulty with using the correct Spanish words in both Example 3 and Example 4, and his embarrassed, quick utterance in English in line 11, it can be surmised that English is his primary language. Therefore, by using Spanish, he is accommodating to his mother's preference, and in turn, she is making sure his Spanish is accurate. Language choice is often a display of important cultural markers which help display the speaker's preferred identity to their audience (Rampton, 1996, p. 160). Oscar is trying to identify with his mother, and she is attempting to assist him in making his Spanish speaking identity strong.

Daisy. Unlike the first two families, Daisy's family exhibits bilingual speech by all family members. However, while their mother allows them to use English and also allows them to choose their preferred language (Example 5, line 2), the children accommodate her by choosing to use Spanish after she initiates the conversation in this language in Example 5 during their family prayer at dinner.

Example 5: Daisy's family switches between languages during a prayer

D: Daisy; M: mother; B: eldest brother (middle child); L: little brother

((Prayer during dinner begins with Daisy's mother asking the children to choose English or Spanish))

1 M: *Ándale, pues.*

Come on, then.

2 ¿Cómo quieres?

How do you want it?

3 D: ...hm m:

4 L: ... Hold hand[s]!

5 M: [sh:]

6 D: ... Sorry. (H) @

7 Still trying to think of something.

8 L: ... Y #

9 B: Oh.

10 L: 'Kay.

11 M: *Estás bendi[cien]do la comida,*

You're blessing the food,

es [lo que vas] hacer.

that's what you're going to do.

12 L: [Diós]

God

13 [Diós]

God

14 Diós.

God.

15 D: Nothing yet.

16 L: =¿Yo?

Me?

17 B: =Ya. Go.

18 L: Diós:s,

God,

19 gracias por la comida.

thank you for the food.

20 Dale a los que no tienen

Give to those that don't have

21 comi:da. food.

((unintelligible talk from infant for 6.0 seconds))

22 I'm done.

23 B: =Gracias

Thank you

24 Diós,

God,

25 por e[sta comi:da],

for this food,

26 L: [A ver, go mimi.]

Let's see, go to sleep.

27 B: que nos has da:do.

that you have given us.

28 ... Y nos has da:do.

... And you have given us.

29 ... Y-

... And-

30 ... um

31 ...y por los niños

... and for the children

32 que no tenga:n #.

that don't have #.

((microphone interference for 4.5 seconds))

33 Tenemos estar feli:z,

We are happy,

34 ... (H) porque tenemos comida

... (H) because we have food

- 35 ... (H) como ..(H)
like
- 36 ..I- los otros niños
... ththe other children
- 37 que no tengan.
that don't have.
- 38 ... Amen.
- 39 M: Amen.
- 40 ##.
- 41 D: ... m:.
- 42 M: D,
- 43 Dilo tú en inglés.
You say it in English.
- 44 D: ... Thank you Go:d,
45 for the food you have given us.
- 46 ... And please give
47 ... money and food
48 to the people that don't have any.
49 ... What do you have to say mom?
- 50 M: ... Güero Güero,
51 ¿tu pórque vas a dar gracias?
what are you going to give thanks for?
- 52 L: Yo ya lo dije.
I already said it.
- 53 M: Okay, pues.
Okay, then.
- 54 Dilo aquí porque no se escuchó.
Say it here because you couldn't hear it.
- 55 Y dilo bien.
And say it well.
- 56 L: Crap.
- 57 Diosito Diosito,
Dear God Dear God,
- 58 la comida
the food
- 59 ... y dale mas comida
... and give more food
a los que tienen.
to those that have
- 60 M: A [los no que tienen].

- To those that don't have.*
61 L: [y dale mas] dine:ro,
and give more money,
62 a los que no tie:nen.
To those that don't have.
63 Y que no se les, 'cave.
And that they don't run out.
64 Y que ## el Pa- y—
And that ## the Fa- and—
65 ¿Ya? Yeah?
66 M: Amen.
67 L: (Hx)
68 D: Amen.
69 L: #####.
70 M: En el nombre
In the name
71 [del Pa:dre],
of the Father
72 D: [del Pa:dre],
of the Father
73 M: [_2del Hi:jo],
of the Son
74 D: [_2del Hi:jo],
of the Son
75 M: [_3del Espíritu Santo].
of the Holy Spirit.
76 D: [_3del Espíritu Santo].
of the Holy Spirit.
77 L: [_3del Espíritu].
of the Spirit.
78 M: A[4men].
79 D: [4A]men.
<T=94.75 seconds>

The above example shows that the children begin speaking to each other in English in lines 4 through 7. However, after their mother speaks to them in Spanish in line 11 about what they will say in the prayer, the children continue the prayer in Spanish through this entire example.

The only part of the prayer which is not in Spanish is when Daisy takes her turn in lines 44 through 49. Yet, line 43 shows that Daisy says her prayer in English because her mother tells her to do so. In this way, she is still accommodating

to the wishes of her mother, even though she is speaking in English, because she is submitting to her mother's request. When their mother then asks the youngest son to say his prayer again in lines 51 and 53 through 55, she is speaking to him in Spanish and does not request a specific language from him. He again accommodates his mother by saying the prayer in Spanish, and in fact says a translated version in lines 57 through 63 of what Daisy just said.

Also as evidenced by lines 22 and 56, the preferred language for the youngest brother is English. After he first says a prayer, he completes it hastily in line 22 with an English exclamation. Then, just before he starts it a second time, he produces an utterance of discomfort in English. With these personal emotional reactions taking place in English, it is clear that his performance in Spanish is for the purpose of pleasing his mother, and not his preference. The older brother also becomes nervous as he is saying his prayer in Spanish, as can be seen from his deep breaths in and out before each intonation unit in lines 34 and 35, as well as his stutter at the beginning of line 36.

In the data, Daisy's mother prefers Spanish, and her children accommodate to this wish in ritualized speech situations such as the prayer. However, because of their mother's leniency with language choice, the children assert their preference for English in casual conversation, and she accepts it as well as accommodating the language needs of her youngest child when he does not understand her Spanish-language utterances. Interestingly, this may in fact stem from the lack of Spanish enforcement in the home.

Sibling preference for English with each other

The children in this study use Spanish to accommodate their parents, but they show a preference for English when speaking with each other. This preference is so strong that they will go out of their way to make sure they are using English with each other, from codeswitching mid-sentence to interrupting a Spanish conversation.

Jasmine. As previously shown in Example 1, the conversation between Jasmine and her siblings is in English before their mother speaks up and they switch to accommodate her. When the conversation begins in line 1, it is in English and remains so through line 8. The only exception to this is the older sister's brief codeswitching to Spanish for one word in line 4, but she then immediately codeswitches again to English to finish the sentence, solidifying the siblings' preference for an English conversation instead of accommodating their mother's preference for Spanish.

In Example 6, Jasmine is addressing her siblings when she asks them what they ate. Here one of the clearest examples of sibling preference for English takes place.

12 Sí.

Yes.

13 /ej/:

14 ... [₄/bi:/, /si:/, /di:/, /i:/, /ɛf/, /tʃi/,15 B: [₄Why did you hit him?]

16

=[₅Huh?]

17 D:

[₅Así, ira].*Like this, look.*

18 L: /eʃ/!

19 ¡La /eʃ/!

The le!

<T=17.5 seconds>

The youngest brother begins his sentence in line 1 in Spanish, but when it comes to the letter of the alphabet he is asking about, he codeswitches mid-sentence to English. For the rest of his time spent on the alphabet, the youngest brother pronounces every letter in English, even when he assigns it a Spanish pronoun in line 19. When he asks his sister for help in line 3 and again in line 8, this is in English as well. Daisy also communicates about the alphabet in English when she asks him if he knows a certain letter in line 9. She does not switch to Spanish except for line 17 when she gives him the command, “Así, ira.” This is not a surprise, however, because this is a common command in Spanish, and it is very likely that the children associate this with their mother and her Spanish language preference.

Oscar. Oscar and his siblings show the strongest English language preference, as he speaks only English with his sisters throughout all of the data. His younger sister, especially, only involves herself in conversations with her brother when he speaks to her in English. Example 8 shows the very strong preference for English between Oscar and his younger sister.

Example 8: Oscar speaks with his sister exclusively in English

O: Oscar; L: little sister; M: mother

((Oscar and his sister are cleaning together))

1 O: L,

2 You ain't gonna be able to put it here.

3 I'm gonna lift it up, ok?

((Crash in the background))

4 O: Ma, estás bien?

- Mom, are you okay?*
- 5 M: Estoy bien, O.
I'm okay, O.
- 6 O: Kay.
- 7 I'm gonna lift it up from this point.
- 8 Go on.
- 9 ... Over here.
- 10 I only have a few strength right now.
- 11 Go, go, go, go!
- 12 (UGH)
- 13 ##
- 14 ... Pull it from over here.
- 15 L: Huh?
- 16 O: Pull from here.
- 17 L: Over here, no?
- 18 O: =Over there
- 19 on that edge.
- 20 Over here
- 21 from that edge.
- 22 L: It's already pulled.
- 23 O: No,
- 24 pull it more.
- <T=31.0 seconds>*

Throughout this example, the siblings use English exclusively with each other, even though evidence of first language (Spanish) interference is present when Oscar says 'a few strength' in line 10. The only time Spanish is used is in lines 4 and 5 when Oscar switches to Spanish to ask his mother if she is all right and she responds. Immediately after this, when the interaction involves only Oscar and his sister again, he switches back to English in line 6 and continues in this language throughout the rest of the example.

In all of the examples above, the siblings in each family share a common preference for English when speaking with each other. They all have come to use primarily English as a result of the English-only school system, and they only violate this language preference to accommodate their parents. However, when conversation is restricted to siblings, all of the participants use English exclusively to promote sibling solidarity, and they are quick to correct themselves if they begin with Spanish.

The youngest family member's partial accommodation, disaccommodation, and avoidance of Spanish with parents

Daisy. In all of the data, the youngest members of each family exhibit the most difficulty with Spanish language comprehension. For this reason, instances occur when the youngest members avoid using Spanish, even if it disrupts the family dynamics and does not accommodate the interest of their parents. Referring back to Example 5, Daisy's youngest brother shows difficulty with Spanish language comprehension when he attempts to accommodate, becomes overwhelmed, and reverts to English.

The youngest brother says a very short prayer and then ends it almost immediately in line 22 with an English sentence of completion. Later, when his mother asks him to say another prayer, he disaligns himself from her by telling her he already did, implying that he does not want to say it again (line 52). When she insists that he says it again and emphasizes on line 55 that he say it right, he utters the English word "crap," suggesting that he is not happy with this request. Finally, when he does attempt to comply, he does not know the ending to the prayer and stops himself after beginning it in lines 64 and 65. When the family assists him by saying the ending all together, he avoids participating and does not speak except for two words in line 77. His lack of knowledge and assurance during these instances leads him to stop short of completion, speak in English, and avoid talking at all, thereby interrupting and possibly having a negative impact on his family interaction as a whole.

Oscar. Oscar's youngest sister employs even more language avoidance than Daisy's younger brother. Not once in any of the data does she directly respond to the mother when spoken to in Spanish. She does, however, respond to Oscar when he speaks to her in English (Example 8). This difference suggests the possibility that she avoids answering her mother because her level of comprehension in Spanish is not at the level of proficiency necessary for her to feel comfortable responding and accommodating, as she does in English.

In Example 9, Oscar's sister avoids responding to her mother in just this way. When she enters the room singing to herself quietly, her mother asks her what she is saying.

Example 9: Oscar's younger sister avoids responding to her mother

M: Oscar's mother

((Little sister enters singing to herself)).

1 M: Mande?

What?

((No response. Little sister continues to sing for 3 seconds)).

2 M: Péinate acá en el baño.

Brush your hair here in the bathroom.

3 Te espero.

I'll wait for you.

((No response. Little sister continues to sing)).

<T=8.5 seconds>

When the daughter does not respond, her mother issues her a command in line 2 and tells her she will wait for her. Yet, the youngest daughter still does not respond and continues to sing, at which point her mother drops the conversation.

The youngest sister's lack of Spanish language ability causes a complete communication breakdown between her and her mother. Because her mother does not push the matter further, it is evident that she must be aware of her daughter's lack of Spanish comprehension and resultant avoidance of interactions in the language.

Since the youngest children have full English language abilities but limited Spanish language abilities, even though they grew up speaking Spanish at home before any schooling, their socialization into English by their older siblings and the English-only school system has caused a language loss. As they are still expected to communicate in Spanish with their parents but lack the ability to do so, they use avoidance, no matter the cost this has on their families.

In Example 10, Oscar's younger sister uses Spanish selectively for disaccommodation to tell her mother that she is not dry after her bath as her mother wants her to be, while not responding directly to her mother. This shows that she possesses some knowledge of Spanish, but she never uses it in the data beyond purposes of teasing and parental disaccommodation. Therefore, it is possible that her development of Spanish language abilities is limited to these purposes and not a central part of her daily communication. This again suggests a lack of ability for successful Spanish language communication between Oscar's youngest sister and mother, thus inhibiting good family dynamics.

Example 10: Oscar's younger sister uses Spanish to defy her mother

M: mother; S: older sister; L: younger sister

((Oscar's younger sister is supposed to be drying herself after her bath but refuses))

1 S: Ahí va tu hija.

There goes your daughter.

2 M: ..Déjala—

Let her—

3 S: = Mira,

- Look,*
 se va a meter al baño otra vez.
she's going to go in the bathroom again.
- 4 M: Dejala entonces.
Let her then.
- 5 Ya le pusiste la toalla?
Did you give her a towel?
- 6 S: Sí.
Yes.
- 7 M: Okay.
- 8 Ahí, ya.
There, okay.
- 9 L: No me secó nada.
It didn't dry me at all.
- 10 M: Pues, sécate tu.
Well, dry yourself.
- 11 L: [Nada, nada].
Not at all, not at all.
- 12 M: [Seca la # del pelo], S.
Dry the # of hair, S.
- <T=13.25 seconds>

The little sister's use of Spanish in line 9 is in response to the conversation between her older sister and mother in lines 4 through 8. Therefore, she understands at least to some extent what they have just said about her. However, when her mother issues a command in line 10, the youngest avoids responding to it and instead uses Spanish in line 11 to taunt her mother and continue what she said in line 9. This suggests that she does not understand what her mother says, or at least not enough to respond to it. Instead, she continues her expression of defiance and utilizes Spanish to make this defiance clear to her mother. After this instance, Oscar's younger sister utters her only other instance of Spanish in the data to disalign and defy her mother.

The above example shows that Oscar's younger sister does not have strong Spanish-language comprehension. In fact, Example 10 suggests that she does not have the Spanish language abilities necessary to respond to her mother, strengthening her preference for disaccommodation and avoidance. Overall lack of Spanish language abilities is a responsible agent for all instances of partial accommodation, disaccommodation, and avoidance found with the youngest family members in this data.

Discussion

The data presented in this thesis show the differences in family dynamics in three Mexican immigrant families due to their various language practices within the home. Jasmine's mother enforces Spanish language use the most of the three families. As a result, the children all prove to be fluent in Spanish, despite their preference for English with each other. This English preference still has an effect on family dynamics as it leads them to exclude their mother when talking to each other, as shown in Example 1. The nephew's lack of Spanish language abilities further creates difficulties in the family, as he cannot easily communicate with his grandmother. This family's practice of not assisting with Spanish comprehension may promote language learning, but it also solidifies the barrier between Jasmine's nephew and mother in the process.

Oscar's family situation proves to be even more complicated. With frequent Spanish use and assistance from his mother, he is able to comfortably codeswitch between English and Spanish. However, his youngest sister, who lacks the abilities in Spanish that she has in English, is unable to hold a conversation with her mother. This creates a completely divided family and causes the youngest sister to rely on Oscar or her older sister for family communication, being as though they are the only ones who have conversations with her, and these are always in English.

Daisy's family exhibits the most bilingualism in the home. This leads to frequent codeswitching by all of the children and their use of English in casual conversation when given the choice. Since their mother speaks English and their father was unavailable for the recording, they are able to act as a solid family unit.

However, the beginnings of a possible instability in family dynamics can be seen in the youngest brother's lack of Spanish ability during structured Spanish language events, such as the prayer.

An interview I conducted with 22-year-old Carmen, who grew up in a Mexican immigrant family in California, tells a first-hand account of the negative effects that language differences can have on family dynamics. In speaking of the displacement of Spanish language by English due to English-only school programs, Carmen said the following:

Carmen: Ok, well, with Spanish, once I learned English over here and really had it down, in junior high when all my classes were in English and everything was in English, I lost a lot of grammatical stuff in Spanish, because I never had formal education in reading and writing in Spanish, all of the stuff I got was from my mom. And, in junior high, when we had to take a mandatory Spanish class, I noticed how bad my Spanish had gotten. So, when, when we

went to visit my grandparents, I found myself substituting a- a lot of words. Like, I- I couldn't speak to them without- without, substituting words for English.

Carmen's story shows the language barriers, which can be created in families if the child's native language abilities become less proficient. In her case, as well as for the three children who are the focus of this study, the school system was a very strong factor in their loss of Spanish. In becoming bilingual and being involved in an English-only school, Carmen used her English far more than her Spanish, and thus lost communicative abilities with her family in Mexico. This situation parallels the other three cases and foreshadows more trouble in their family dynamics to come, but this can hopefully be halted with further investigation into studies on family dynamics and the implementation of these findings in the school system.

Conclusion

All three of the families in this project utilize both English and Spanish within the home, whether between parents and children or between siblings. All of the children thus show bilingual abilities to varying degrees. However, as soon as English replaces Spanish as the preferred language for a member of the household, language barriers developed. As a result, the family dynamics were disrupted.

Still, all the children accommodate their parents' preference for Spanish, with the exception of Oscar's youngest sister and Jasmine's nephew. This pattern shows the importance for the children of showing goodwill towards their parents.

Furthermore, by attempting to communicate with all members of their family in either English or Spanish, all three of the target children did their best to maintain cohesive family units. However, their preference for English with their siblings still remained clear.

The youngest members of Oscar and Jasmine's families provide the strongest examples of communication breakdowns resulting from their lack of Spanish language ability. Due to Spanish language displacement because of their older siblings' preference for English and with their own experiences in the English-only school system, they are unable to communicate as effectively as their older siblings, much less accommodate to, the Spanish speaking parents. This lack of fluency disrupts the family dynamics and can lead to complete reliance on the older siblings as translators between the youngest and the parents.

Previous linguistic research has focused on the family's role in developing bilingualism in children. However, this project has shown the important of looking at the other side of the situation to discover the bilingual child's role in the

family. With the results of this study, it is possible to bring awareness to the issue of bilingual abilities and the effects they have on family dynamics. By using these results, Mexican immigrant families can develop better strategies for in-home bilingual development, such as speaking primarily in Spanish as in Jasmine's family but translating and assisting when necessary, as in Daisy's family. Applying the information from this project, Mexican immigrant families and concerned researchers and educators will be able to work towards fostering bilingual children while maintaining strength in family dynamics.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Corinne Seals recently completed her PhD in Linguistics from Georgetown University, focusing on Applied Linguistics and Sociolinguistics. She also holds an MS in Linguistics from Georgetown University and a BA in Sociocultural Linguistics from UC Santa Barbara. Her research focuses primarily on heritage language acquisition, multilingualism, language socialization, and language and identity. She currently serves as the Ukrainian Language Representative for the Center for Applied Linguistics.