

Strategies for Bilingual Maintenance: Case Studies of Mexican-Origin Families in Texas

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This article examines strategies Mexican-American parents, grandparents, and other family members employ in their efforts to assist children to maintain and develop Spanish while developing their linguistic and academic abilities in English. We focus on three south Texas families, selected from a sample of forty families, who represent a range of possible home language maintenance strategies as well as different socioeconomic levels and modes of life. The three families include a rural family living on a south Texas ranch, a working class family living in an urban *barrio*, and an upper middle class professional family living in an ethnically mixed suburban neighborhood. Analysis of audiotapes of extensive home observations and a variety of proficiency measures indicated that children in all three families had achieved proficiency in English. However, only the children in the rural family had maintained native proficiency in Spanish. The maintenance of Spanish by the children in the rural family is attributable to several factors, among them the parents' insistence that the children use Spanish among themselves, the relative isolation of the ranch on which the family lived, and frequent visits to Mexico and contact with monolingual Spanish-speaking relatives.

INTRODUCTION

According to the 1993 U.S. Census report, one in seven U.S. residents speaks a language other than English at home. Moreover, increasing numbers of children

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are learning one language at home and proceeding through pre-school and grade school programs that require them to adopt a different language. Much of the debate about the education of language minority children has concerned the choice between ESL programs, which often seek to move children into all-English classes at the earliest opportunity, and bilingual programs, whether transitional or maintenance (August & García, 1988; Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990). In communities with a sufficient number of students who share a home language, and where state or local policy favors bilingual programs, debate about the type of program that will offer the greatest benefits for children's linguistic and cognitive development has centered on questions dealing with instructional sequencing and structure. Thus, researchers and educational policy makers have debated what proportion of instruction should be in English and what in the home language, whether the two languages should be kept entirely separate or whether code alternation should be permitted and encouraged, and at what age children should be transitioned to all English classrooms (Arias & Casanova, 1993; Hakuta, 1986; Stanford Working Group, 1993).

While such curricular concerns are certainly deserving of study, the overwhelming concentration of attention on the formal education of language minority students invites the inference that school is the most important arena for language practice where bilingualism can flourish. Such an inference would indeed be unfortunate in reference to a context such as the United States, where many educators and policy makers have long viewed loss of the mother tongue as a positive step towards Americanization (Hakuta, 1986; Secada & Lightfoot, 1993). In such a context, research in the sociology of language as well as in the linguistic dimensions of language maintenance and shift indicates that dual language maintenance cannot be achieved without a strong commitment on the part of the home (Fishman, 1991; Hakuta & d'Andrea, 1992; Hakuta & Pease-Alvarez, 1994).

This article aims to provide policy-makers, educators, and teachers of language minority students with a broader perspective on the strategies parents, grandparents, and other family members employ in their efforts to assist children to maintain and develop Spanish while developing their linguistic and academic abilities in English. We focus on three south Texas families who represent a range of possible home language maintenance strategies as well as different socioeconomic levels and modes of life. The participants in the study include a rural family living on a south Texas ranch, a working class family living in an urban *barrio*, and an upper middle class professional family living in an ethnically mixed suburban neighborhood. Strategies for Spanish maintenance range from insistence upon the exclusive use of Spanish in the home among the ranch family to use of Spanish in parent-child interactions for a set time each week in the working class family to nearly exclusive use of English among the immediate family combined with extensive

involvement in Mexican cultural activities outside the home in the middle class family.

Methods

A Language Socialization Perspective

The analysis that follows is based on a larger study of the relationship between home language socialization practices and the development of bilingual and biliterate abilities by Mexican-descent children. Research in language socialization has conceptualized language acquisition as a composite phenomenon of cognitive-linguistic and socio-cultural factors (Gaskins, Miller & Corsaro, 1992; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). The process by which children become socialized into the interpretative frameworks of their culture, moreover, includes not only the period of primary language acquisition, that is, from infancy to the age of five; it extends throughout childhood and into adolescence (Goodwin, 1990; Heath, 1983). Researchers working within this framework see both the context of interaction and the culturally sanctioned roles of the participants as major determinants of language forms and strategies used in given situations. For example, as Ochs and Schieffelin (1995) observe, the frequency with which a grammatical form appears in a child's environment may have very little to do with when the child actually begins to use the form. A child may fail to use a form that is very common in the environment because it is culturally or situationally inappropriate to do so. Conversely, a child may use forms that are rare in the environment because such forms are seen as culturally appropriate for children.

Recently, a number of scholars have extended the tradition of language socialization research to study the linguistic development of children in bi- and multi-lingual communities (Eisenberg, 1986; Kulik, 1993; Pease-Alvarez & Vasquez, 1994; Schecter & Bayley, in press; Schieffelin, 1994; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez & Shannon, 1994). In addition to looking at children's developing competence in various speech events, this line of research has the potential to elucidate patterns of meaning suggested by the use of different linguistic codes in speech and literacy performances as well as family and community ideologies concerning the symbolic importance of different languages. The larger study upon which the present article is based seeks to contribute to this line of research, with special attention to the issues that arise between parents, children, and schools when minority language transmission is a factor in language socialization.

Participants and Data Sources

The larger inquiry focused on forty families (twenty in California and twenty in Texas) with at least one parent or primary caretaker of Mexican origin and at least one fourth, fifth, or sixth grade child who served as the focal child for the study. Of these forty families, eight (four at each site) were selected for intensive case

study. Selection was based on the representativeness of the emerging family language use profiles distilled from interviews and preliminary observations of the forty families. Case study observations were audio-taped and approximately one third were video-taped as well. The primary focus of attention was on patterns of communication in the home (e.g., who spoke what language to whom) and on the relationships among language choice and dimensions of language use such as topic, register, mode, and speaker age. In this article, we examine the home language practices of three of the eight families selected for intensive case study. Data sources for each of the families include approximately 25 hours of audio-taped observations,¹ approximately eight of which were also videotaped, two interviews with the mother (and in some cases the father), two interviews with the focal child, and samples of the focal child's writing in English and, if the child had achieved some degree of biliteracy, in Spanish as well. In addition, because we wished to obtain data that would allow for cross-linguistic comparisons of children's narrative competence, we also collected English and Spanish narratives based on two wordless picture books, *Frog, where are you?* and *A boy, a dog, a frog, and a friend* (Mayer, 1969; Mayer & Mayer, 1970). The first of these books has been widely used as an elicitation device in studies of language development (see Berman & Slobin, 1994, pp. 665–678 for a full list of studies using the 'Frog' stories). We used the second 'Frog' story because we wished to avoid the impression of testing the children by having them tell the same story in both languages, while at the same time, we wished to obtain comparable Spanish and English data.

In order to capture a range of family interactions, including those focusing on school and literacy activities, at least twelve home observations were conducted at four different times in three separate weeks during periods when school was in session. Observation periods included at least three afternoons, beginning shortly after the children returned from school, three early morning periods from the time the children awoke until they left for school, three weekend mornings, and three Sunday evenings from the time the family returned from their weekend activities until the children's bedtime. In addition, because the interviews and early observations indicated that interactions with Spanish-dominant relatives comprised both a means and an incentive for Spanish maintenance, a number of weekend observations were scheduled at times when relatives were visiting and their interactions with the focal children were recorded. On one occasion, two of the authors accompanied one family on one of their biweekly visits with relatives on the Mexican side of the border.

To prepare the data, audio recordings of interviews with family members were transcribed in full. Selected portions of the home observations, containing informal interactions between focal children and siblings, parents, and other relatives, were also transcribed, as were conversations concerning schoolwork and other aspects of literacy. Standard procedures for analyzing qualitative data were employed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Spindler & Spindler, 1987).

All data relating to the same family were grouped to yield case studies of different families' experiences with bilingualism. Behaviors and responses of individual family members were compared, and a second comparison was made across families.

The remainder of the article is devoted to a discussion of findings about patterns of language use in three representative south Texas families. We also examine the strategies parents had adopted for transmitting Spanish intergenerationally and the differing degrees of success families achieved in their goal of raising children with proficiency in English and Spanish.

FINDINGS

All the parents of our case study families viewed Spanish as important to their sense of cultural identity. Despite the importance they ascribed to knowledge of Spanish, however, the parents in two of the three families expressed concern over their children's relatively limited proficiency. In this section, we draw upon transcripts of home observations, interviews, and ethnographic field notes, the retellings of the "Frog" stories, and written narratives to illustrate the strategies parents adopted to promote their children's bilingual development, as well as the results they achieved.

The Gómez Family

Spanish only in Home Interactions

Esteban and María Gómez² and their three sons, Ernesto (age 12), Carlos (age 10), and Antonio (age 5), live on a cattle ranch in the southwest quadrant of San Antonio, where Sr. Gómez has worked for more than ten years. Although the ranch is within the city limits, the environment is rural. Only two other families, also immigrants from northern Mexico, live within easy walking distance.

Both Esteban and María Gómez were raised in northern Mexico, Esteban on a cattle ranch and Maria in a small border city. Both completed nine years of schooling in Mexico. Over the course of several interviews, María Gómez, who also completed a secretarial course and later worked as a secretary, evidenced considerable pride in her own proper use of Spanish, as well as concern that her children acquire standard Mexican Spanish, as distinct from the local Texas variety.

Of the San Antonio participants, the Gómez family maintained the closest ties to Mexico. Nearly all of their relatives lived in a neighboring Mexican state. In fact, most members of María Gómez's large family have continued to live in the border city where she grew up. During the period of our case study, the family made the 100-mile journey to the border approximately twice a month to spend the weekend with family members. The Gómez children, who also regularly spent parts of their

school vacations with their father's family on a Mexican ranch, thus had ample occasions to use Spanish with their non-English speaking relatives.

Neither Esteban nor María Gómez had sufficient proficiency in English to choose whether to raise their children with Spanish, English, or both languages (cf. the parents in Schecter, Sharken-Taboada, & Bayley, in press). Most of Sr. Gómez's working days at the ranch were spent performing tasks alone or with other Spanish-dominant workers. Sra. Gómez had taken English classes in the local adult school and achieved the basic proficiency necessary to obtain a part-time position in a school cafeteria. However, she never gained sufficient proficiency to be able to engage in sustained English conversation.

Despite the fact that they did not have a choice as to which language their children would acquire first, the Gómezes did have a clearly-articulated vision of the language proficiencies that they desired for their children and a clearly-developed strategy for achieving that goal. After considerable discussion, they had decided that their children would have ample opportunity to learn English at school; their role as parents would be to ensure that their sons did not lose Spanish. In our first interview with her, María Gómez outlined the family's language decisions,

Mi esposo y yo siempre hemos platicado de eso y queremos que aquí en la casa sea el español. Y queremos aprender inglés para cuando salimos. Pero aquí en casa primero- lo primero queremos que los niños aprendan bien el español.

(My husband and I have talked a great deal about this and we want Spanish to be the language of the home. And we want to learn English for when we go out. But here at home the first- the first thing we want is for the children to learn Spanish well.)

Somewhat later in the same interview, Sra. Gómez clarified her idea of the conditions necessary for her children to become proficient bilinguals. She had no doubt that the children would acquire English. Both of the school-age children had been enrolled in all-English classes since the first grade. Her role in helping her sons to become bilingual was to make sure that they kept up with their Spanish. As she put it,

[los niños] van a ser bilingües porque el español aquí lo van a tener.

(they [the boys] are going to be bilingual because they are going to have Spanish here [at home]).

The insistence on the use of Spanish in the Gómez home was applied to children and visitors alike. For example, during a visit by two of the authors and a research assistant to arrange an observation schedule, the assistant made a comment to one of the authors in English while Sra. Gómez was in the next room. Sra. Gómez, however, overheard the comment, and rebuked the assistant, remarking, "Aquí hablamos nomás español." ('Here we speak only Spanish.') The household ban on English did not, however, extend to television. During weekend observations, one or more of the Gómez children were often watching English language programs.

Sr. and Sra. Gómez's decision, constantly reaffirmed, to insist on Spanish in family interactions proved effective for minority language maintenance. Indeed, although the two older boys were both fluent in English and the youngest had attended a predominantly English-speaking pre-school for two years, the Gómez children were among the few in the study who regularly used Spanish in their conversations with one another. One example, from a weekend observation, illustrates the degree to which the Gómez children maintained Spanish in their ordinary conversation. On the day in question, the three brothers were playing together in front of the house. Antonio, the youngest child, was riding a tractor toy when Ernesto, the focal child, began to push him towards a large hilly area to the side of the house. When they arrived at the hilly area, Ernesto repeatedly pushed Antonio, still riding his tractor, up a slope. Throughout the procedure, Antonio protested, only half seriously, and repeatedly expressed his fear that he would fall off the tractor toy. Indeed, as he feared, Antonio did fall off the tractor toy a number of times on the bumpy ride down the hill, and the tape is punctuated by loud noises of protest and occasional thumps. However, each time he got up ready for another ride. As shown in the following excerpt, the entire interaction took place in Spanish:

Ernesto: Vamos a llevarla y te llevo ahí por donde te gusta /Antonio: no/ andale, si?

(Let's take it [the tractor toy] and take you down by where you like to go /Antonio: no/ com'on, let's do it.)

Antonio: Ok.

Ernesto: A ver yo te doy te doy te doy te doy.

(Let's see I'll push you, I'll push you, I'll push you.)

Dale por el zacate.

(Go by the side of the grass.)

‘hora dale.

(Now go ahead.)

[Antonio begins to move in the other direction.]

A no por aquí.

(Not that way, this way.)

Ernesto: [to Carlos] A ver . . . vamos a darle la vuelta.

(Let's see . . . let's take him around.)

[to Antonio]: Ya sabes correr a subirte, ¿verdad?

(So you know that you have to run to the top [of the hill], right?)

Mira pasa aquí mira /Antonio: ¡esperate!// por aquí mira. ¿Ok?

(Look go this way, look. /Antonio: wait!// This way, look. ¿Ok?)

Antonio: Ya me cai[go], ya me cai[go], ya me cai[go].

(I'm falling, I'm falling, I'm falling.)

Ernesto: Andale.

(Come on.)

- Antonio:** Pos me voy a caer. /Ernesto: ¡ay!/
(But I'm going to fall /Ernesto: ¡ay!/)

Ernesto: Mira le pegamos allá.
(Look, we'll end up over there.)

Antonio: Estamos en- me voy a subir allá.
(We're in- I'm going to go up over there.)

Ernesto: Orale, dale otra vez por ahí.
(Yeah, try it one more time over there.)
A ver otra vez.
(Let's see, try it again.)
Esta vez sí te voy a subir aunque no quieras.
(This time I'm going to get you up there whether you like it or not.)

Antonio: ¡Ay me voy a caer, me voy a caer, me voy a caer!
(Ay I'm going to fall, I'm going to fall, I'm going to fall!)

Ernesto: A ver, ahora bájate por ahí otra vez.
(Let's see, now go down that way one more time.)

Clearly Ernesto, and especially Antonio, were not using Spanish because they suspected the researcher was interested in their degree of Spanish maintenance. Nor were they using Spanish to please their mother, who was not in the area where the boys were playing. Rather, the brothers interacted in Spanish because, in contrast to the practice of siblings in the majority of Texas families included in the larger sample and the siblings in the two other case study families discussed below, Spanish is their language of daily communication in the home.

The previous example illustrates the use of Spanish in a highly informal situation unrelated to school or to any type of literacy activity. The Gómez brothers' use of Spanish, however, was not confined to such informal activities as Saturday play. Among the many responsibilities he exercised as the oldest son, Ernesto, who was very successful in his school work, was often charged with assisting his younger brother with homework. In the excerpt below, recorded during one of the after school observations, Ernesto volunteers to assist Carlos to review his assigned spelling words. Note that although the subject, English spelling, is one that would seem most likely to favor the use of English, the main language of the interaction is Spanish.

- Ernesto:** Te ayudo con la, para para que estudies diciendote las palabras, ah Carlos.
(I'm helping you with the [word list] so, so that you can study while I read you the words, ok Carlos?)

Carlos: ¿Cuáles palabras?
(What words?)

Ernesto: Pos las palabras que tienes para . . . Mrs. Lamar . . . las palabras aquí estan. A ver. ¿Las palabras que tienen estrella?

(Well the words that you have for . . . Mrs. Lamar . . . the words are here [points to a sheet of paper with spelling words]. Let's see. The words that have an asterisk?)

Carlos: Yeah.

Ernesto: A ver. Listo a ver . . . bargain.
(Let's see. Ready, let's see . . .)

Carlos: b-a-g-a-i-n.

Ernesto: Carlos mira, fijate, dijiste . . . Ok. bien nomás que te faltó una letra b-a-r. No b-a-g-a-i-n.
(Carlos look, pay attention, you said . . . Ok. well, the only thing that's missing is a letter.)

Sr. and Sra. Gómez's strategy, reinforced by the relative isolation of the ranch, by frequent and sometimes prolonged visits to Mexico, and by close ties with monolingual Spanish-speaking relatives, was successful in the case of Ernesto. He had retained native speaker proficiency in Spanish and, in large measure due to his mother's efforts, had learned to read and write in Spanish as well. Nor did his English suffer as a result. Rather, as indicated by his superior performance in all-English classes, by his writing sample, by his performance in an extended English interview with one of the English-dominant members of the research team, and by his English "Frog" narrative, Ernesto developed native-like proficiency in English. The degree of proficiency of this sixth grader may be inferred from the opening of his English writing sample, where he was asked to narrate a memorable experience that he had in school:

Last week we were playing basketball. Then this kid named Jeremy was going to get the ball. Somebody on the other team threw the ball at Jeremy when he was tying [sic] his shoe. After the ball went over his head it came straight at me. When I caught it everyone on Jeremy's team came stumbling and rushing at me. Before they reached me I threw it to Nate. Nate then shot a three pointer and swished it in marvelously. . . .

Carlos, the middle child in the family, while he also retained native proficiency in Spanish and near-native proficiency in English, experienced frequent difficulties in his school work. According to Sra. Gómez, Carlos' teachers attributed his difficulties to the family's language practices. In her first interview, she described the responses of her children's teachers to her language use decisions and her own reaction to their suggestions:

Yo he tenido problemas con sus maestras- porque las maestras me dicen que tienen que dejar un poco atrás el español para que vayan más rápido en las clases. Y yo digo que no, que las clases pueden seguir siendo en inglés y todo y que los niños sigan en español como- como hasta ahora. (I've had problems with their teachers- because the teachers tell me that they have to forget about Spanish a bit so that they can progress more rapidly in their classes. And I say no, that the classes may continue in English and everything and that the children may continue in Spanish like, like until now.)

Case studies such as these cannot, of course, provide conclusive evidence that the teachers were mistaken in their estimate of the source of Carlos' difficulties. However, the fact that his older brother, who had been raised in the same language environment, was very successful in school suggests that the assumption that Carlos' difficulties were attributable to the use of Spanish in the home is at best premature. Indeed, our data suggest an alternative explanation for those difficulties. Unlike his older brother, Carlos never developed Spanish literacy, a fact that his mother regretted. Although he spoke Spanish with ease, he could neither read a simple Spanish text nor could he produce a Spanish writing sample. It is at least as likely that his problems stemmed from lack of literacy in his first language as from excessive emphasis on Spanish on the part of his parents (Cummins, 1986, 1996).

We turn now to a consideration of the language practices of two families whose children are dominant in English. These families adopted very different strategies in their efforts to maintain Spanish and to develop their children's sense of Latino identity.

The Torres Family

Language Revival through Use at Set Periods and Family Tutoring

José and Elena Torres and their three daughters, Liliana (age 12), Marta (age 11), and Alicia (age 10) live in an overwhelmingly Latino neighborhood. Both were born in San Antonio, as were their three children. Both parents work, José in a facility that rebuilds aircraft parts and Elena in a service position at the local community college. Mr. and Mrs. Torres acquired Spanish at home from their parents, who immigrated from northern Mexico as young adults, and both continue to use Spanish with their mothers. Like many Mexican-Americans of their generation, the Torreses acquired English at school during an era when any use of Spanish on school grounds was a punishable offense (Hurtado & Rodríguez, 1989). Although both are literate in English, neither learned to read or write in Spanish. José and Elena Torres speak both Spanish and English with one another. As is the case with many Mexican-Americans in Texas, their speech with one another and with other bilinguals is characterized by frequent code switching (Bayley & Zapata, 1994). Outside of the home, they accommodate to the language preferences of their interlocutors or to the demands of the situation. Ordinarily they use English with their children, although in those interactions as well, they frequently alternate between Spanish and English.

In recent years, the Torreses have become increasingly concerned about the lack of Spanish proficiency of their three strongly English-dominant children. Their concern, shared by many Mexican-American parents, arises from instrumental as well as cultural considerations. According to Mrs. Torres,

... en el trabajo vas a necesitar que saber español y si estas niñas no saben español van a tener un problema....a crecer siendo mexicanas y no saber español- no está bien eso. ... Yo cuando miro una mexicana pues yo pienso que ella sabe español. Y muchas no saben.

(. . . at work you're going to have to know Spanish and if these girls don't know Spanish they're going to have a problem . . . to grow up being Mexican and not knowing Spanish-that isn't good. . . . When I see a Mexican well I think that she speaks Spanish. But many don't know it.)

To avert the loss of Spanish by their daughters, the Torreses have adopted two main strategies. Mrs. Torres' mother provides weekly Spanish lessons, and in the home, José and Elena require their daughters to speak Spanish one day a week. When they first instituted a 'Spanish day,' they settled on Saturday, reasoning that the increased exposure time afforded by a day when the children were not attending school in English would enable them to progress more rapidly. However, they soon found that insistence upon Spanish for an entire day required too much energy to sustain, so they switched to a weekday, a practice they had maintained for a year prior to our home observations. The combination of a "Spanish day" and lessons from a grandmother resulted in at least partial fulfillment of the parents' goals. Marta, the focal child in our investigation, attempted to use Spanish with her mother when we recorded the family interactions on several "Spanish days," and, when she was interviewed in Spanish, she responded to all questions appropriately. As the following interaction with her mother suggests, however, Marta's receptive ability outpaced her productive capacity, and her Spanish exhibits many early interlanguage features (e.g., highly unstable verbal morphology as in *yo tieno/yo tienes* below):

Marta: Mom, ya hicimos vacuum.

(Mom, we finished vacuuming.)

Mother: Está bien prontito. ¿Ya barrites tu cuarto?

(Come on now, quickly. Have you swept your room?)

Marta: Sí.

(yes.)

Mother: ¿Y todo lo barrites?

(and you swept it all?)

Marta: Sí, bien . . .

(yes, [I swept it] well . . .)

Yo tieno, no yo tienes. I don't know how you say 'have'. Mom, how do you say have?

(I have, no I have . . .)

Mother: half? what? medio.

Marta: have, like you have to close the door.

Mother: Tienes que.

Marta: Ok, what about 'I have homework'?

Mother: Tengo tarea.

Marta: Tengo carea (sic).

Despite her rudimentary command of oral Spanish, Marta's Spanish has surpassed her mother's in one respect. Unlike her mother, Marta has acquired minimal

Spanish literacy and sometimes is called upon to read Spanish-language leaflets and shopping coupons. Elena Torres commented on her daughter's ability in our first cycle of interviews:

A lot of times I get the [shopping] coupons in Spanish and it's like, "ok Marta, ven a decirme que dice aquí." ("ok Marta, come and tell me what it says here.")

Although Mrs. Torres' comment might be dismissed as a parent's exaggerated estimate of a daughter's abilities, Marta confirmed her mother's claim when she was asked about her own Spanish reading in our first interview with her:

Int: ¿Y has leído en español?
(And have you read in Spanish?)

Marta: Nomás uno papel por mi mamá.
(Only a paper for my mom.)

Int: 'por tú mamá' ¿Por qué?
(For your mom. Why?)

Marta: Uhm. Porque no entiende.
(Because she doesn't understand.)

Int: ¿No entiende?
(She doesn't understand?)

Marta: En español no . . . No sabe cómo leer en español . . .
(In Spanish, no . . . She doesn't know how to read in Spanish.)

Int: ¿Entonces tú lo leíste?
(Then you read it?)

Marta: I sound it out.

The difference in literacy abilities highlighted by the two excerpts above appears puzzling at first. Mrs. Torres, after all, is a native speaker of Spanish and, although she never had the opportunity for higher education, there is no question that she is literate in English. She frequently assists her children with homework and regularly reads the Bible in English. Marta, in contrast, lacks the Spanish proficiency necessary to carry on a sustained conversation about any topic without resorting to English. Consideration of the circumstances under which the mother and daughter were educated, however, resolves the paradox. As we have noted, Mrs. Torres went to school at a time when children were punished for using Spanish, even on the playground. Although she came from a Spanish-speaking family, she was never encouraged to read Spanish, nor was Spanish literacy valued in the larger society. Her daughter, however, is growing up at a time when, at least in south Texas, bilingualism is viewed by many as a positive attribute (Bayley & Zapata, 1994). Unlike her mother, Marta has not been told that she cannot read Spanish nor has she been convinced that reading her parents' first language is an activity without value. Thus, she approaches unfamiliar texts in Spanish much as she approaches unfamiliar words in English- she sounds them out.

Although José and Elena Torres' language revival strategy, as illustrated by the examples above, has not resulted in the children's developing Spanish fluency, there is some promise that it will achieve greater results in the future. The family now attends Spanish-language church services and lessons from the children's grandmother are continuing, as is the family practice of devoting a day each week to Spanish. The children's schools, however, are missing from the picture, despite the desire for support expressed by parents such as Mrs. Torres, who, when asked what the schools might do to help, commented,

I would think that a class, even just 30 minutes a day, where they can go in and speak only Spanish and the correct Spanish. And learn spelling and writing it and reading it. I think that would be a great impact on the children. I think as long as it's consistent that it would be wonderful.

Elena Torres is involved with her children's education, as an active member of the PTA, as a volunteer to accompany children on field trips, and as a manager who oversees completion of homework assignments. That is, she provides active support on a number of dimensions for the school system's agenda for her children. Our data, however, do not provide any indication that the schools her children attend provide any support for her considerable efforts to transmit her language. Despite those efforts, and despite the fact that the family lives in an almost entirely Latino neighborhood in a city with a majority Mexican-descent population, the schools appear unmotivated to provide the kinds of programs that would assist the family in its efforts to reverse the process of language loss.

The Baez Family

Cultural Maintenance Combined with Minority Language Awareness

We turn now to the Baez family, whose middle and youngest daughters evidenced the least proficiency in Spanish among the families reported on here.³ Roberto and Luisa Baez and their daughters, Linda (age 12), Alysa (age 10), and Liliana (age 6), live in a new middle-class subdivision on the predominantly Anglo north side of San Antonio. A college graduate, Roberto is an engineer with a local firm; Luisa, who completed two years of college, works as a customer service representative. In the Baez family, English has always been the language of parent-child interactions, with Spanish reserved for endearments and other formulaic phrases. As might be expected in a majority-Anglo neighborhood, English is first language of nearly all the children's friends. However, the children do have occasion to use Spanish in weekly visits with their grandparents, who live in San Antonio, and Roberto and Luisa have attempted to motivate their daughters to maintain or to learn Spanish by appealing to their enthusiasm for Tejano music. In our first interview, for example, Luisa Baez commented,

Cuando vamos a la casa de mi mama y también de mis suegros si hablamos español. Nuevamente hemos comprado discos porque a las niñas les gustan la música tejana y la compramos porque pensamos que así van aprender mas palabras en español y se van ayudar ellas mismas. Aunque sean cantando canciones pero así van aprender.
(When we go to my mother's house and also to my in-laws we speak Spanish. Again we've bought CDs because the girls like Tejano music, and we bought them because we thought this way they're going to learn more words in Spanish and they're going to help themselves. If nothing else by singing songs they're going to learn.)

In addition, Alysa, the focal child in our study, has attended Spanish classes in the summer "College for Kids" offered by the local community college district, and the children are all enrolled in activities that promote Mexican cultural awareness. However, as the following excerpt from Alysa's Spanish "Frog" narrative shows, the focal child in this family spoke an early interlanguage variety of Spanish, characterized by highly variable gender marking (e.g., *un muchachita*, 'a boy'), an idiosyncratic article system (*un* for indefinite sg., *la* and occasionally *lo* for definite sg.), a very reduced verb system (*estaba* + adj. for states, *estaba* + English Ving for progressives, occasional preterits used for punctual verbs, infinitive elsewhere), and invented vocabulary (e.g., *cotar* for catch):

Había una vez un muchachita y un perro y a frog estaba fishing en un lake.

(Once upon a time a boy and a dog and a frog were fishing in a lake.)

Un un muchachita un perro y un lana [sic] estaba fishing

(A a boy a dog and a frog were fishing)

y luego la muchachita cotar un fish.

(and then the boy caught a fish.)

La fish- la fish uhm grabbed la la muchachita into la agua.

(The fish- the fish uhm grabbed the the boy into the water.)

Y lo perro y lo lara, la la rana y la l- rana went into la agua o- otra

vez con la muchachita.

(And the dog and the frog, the the frog and the frog went into the water again with the boy.)

The limited code exemplified by Alysa's "Frog" narrative is clearly insufficient for conversation with Spanish monolinguals. However, like Marta Torres, Alysa does exhibit considerably more receptive than productive ability, and thus may have at least some foundation to assist her in reacquiring her parents' first language at some later period.⁴

DISCUSSION

The three families profiled in this article were selected because they were representative of the range of families in our San Antonio sample. Like most Texas Latinos, and in contrast to the majority of the adult Latino population in California (Solé, 1995), two of the three sets of parents were born and grew up in Texas. The

children of these US-born parents were English-dominant and, at least at the point in their lives when they were observed for this study, they had not attained sufficient productive Spanish proficiency to transmit the language to future generations.

The lack of Spanish proficiency among children of Texas-born parents parallels findings of previous research conducted in northern California (Hakuta & Pease-Alvarez, 1994). The results, however, run counter to the hypothesis that underlay the original design of the larger study from which the case studies in the present article have been extracted. On the basis of theories of ethnolinguistic vitality (Allard & Landry, 1992; Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977; Landry & Allard, 1992, 1994), we identified five salient characteristics that favored Spanish maintenance in San Antonio:

1. Concentration: San Antonio has a Latino majority.⁵
2. The San Antonio Latino community is overwhelmingly comprised of persons of Mexican descent, the majority of whom originated in the northern border states of Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas, and many of whom maintain close ties with families in Mexico.
3. In contrast to many major cities in the United States, which are characterized by a multiplicity of ethnic and racial groups, Latinos and Anglos comprise the two main ethnicities/cultures in San Antonio.
4. San Antonio is within easy driving distance of Mexico.
5. Unlike other border states such as California and Arizona, Texas has not adopted measures to make English its official language and state officials have opposed attempts to do so at the national level.

The extent of language loss exhibited by second and third generation Mexican-American children in this study, however, suggests that these factors are insufficient to counteract the historical pattern by which immigrant families move from monolingualism in the immigrant language to monolingualism in English in three or four generations (Fishman, 1966; Hakuta, 1986; Veltman, 1983). Indeed, even the considerable effort by urban parents such as Mr. and Mrs. Torres may be insufficient to avert a shift to English monolingualism. Moreover, language shift is occurring despite the beliefs articulated by many parents concerning the importance of maintaining Spanish, both for instrumental, and, even more importantly from the perspective of Mexican-American parents, for purposes of cultural identity, beliefs that are expressed most forcefully in our data by Elena Torres,

I feel that . . . just because they [her children] were born here does not mean that only English is the language that should be used. I believe that we have to hold to something, and that something is my parents come from Mexico. And if I don't have something to hold on to then what is our culture? What do we teach our children? There is nothing there, if we have to give that up.

We would not, however, conclude this discussion of findings concerning Mexican-origin families' language use strategies and their children's development of bilin-

gual/biliterate abilities without drawing attention to the complexities of the sociocultural and historical context which serves both to inform and to constrain parents' choices with regard to language. Mexican-origin communities within the U.S. live with a daily intermingling of dominant and minority cultures; and, on a daily basis parents and children alike confront questions of discreteness and synthesis of linguistic code. The manner in which they choose to deal with these questions has to do not only with societal and community norms for socialization, but also with individuals' interpretative frameworks. These interpretative frameworks develop within dynamic sociocultural contexts in which attitudes of both majority and minority communities towards minority language maintenance and bilingualism are undergoing considerable changes. Such attitudinal changes are reflected in the options language minority parents perceive, and in the stances they take toward the cultural resources available, the main one being language. Language socialization research has provided detailed analyses of caregivers' interactions with children and differing societal views of children as conversational partners, and has provided important insights into practices by which children become members of speech communities. It has not, however, attended sufficiently to the dynamic character of the context in which socialization takes place.

The case studies reported here represent an effort to fill that lacuna in the literature. From a language socialization perspective that takes into account the dynamic character of the sociocultural context in which language minority families find themselves, the successful Spanish maintenance of Ernesto Gómez and the relative lack of Spanish proficiency of Marta Torres and Alysa Baez cannot be explained solely as the result of one-time parental decisions, however often reiterated. Rather, the circumstances of their lives facilitated Esteban and María Gómez's decision to insist on the use of Spanish in the home, despite pressures from the children's teachers to alter their practice. The circumstances of the Torres and Baez families, however, were quite different. José and Elena Torres' initial decision to raise their children in English was a consequence, in part, of their desire to spare the children the difficulties they themselves had experienced during a time when Spanish was prohibited on school grounds. In south Texas, however, attitudes towards bilingualism have changed in the intervening years, as have attitudes towards Mexican culture generally. Their efforts at language revival may be seen as a response to these changes. The case of Alysa Baez reflects another change in circumstances. Alysa was cared for by her Spanish-monolingual grandmother until she was four. At that time, her parents moved from a predominantly Mexican-origin neighborhood to a relatively affluent mixed neighborhood and she entered an English-speaking daycare center. That is, the move occasioned a disruption of the process of language socialization into a Mexican-origin speech community and a need for Alysa to acquire the language and the repertoire of speech acts appropriate to a community in which English is the main language of day-to-day interactions. Moreover, the life histories of many of the forty families in the larger study from

which the case studies in this article were drawn indicate that the changes in circumstances that the Torres and Baez families experienced are not uncommon (cf. Schecter, Sharken-Taboada & Bayley, *in press*). Such changes and their impact need to be considered for researchers to understand fully the diversity of ways in which children from language minority families are socialized through language.

A final issue that emerges from our study of language use in San Antonio families concerns the role of the schools in supporting or impeding parental efforts to raise their children bilingually. As we have seen, in the case of the Gómez family, María Gómez perceived her children's teachers as hostile to her efforts to ensure that her sons would achieve full proficiency in Spanish. For the Torres and Baez families, the idea that the schools would play any role in their efforts to revive or provide at least minimal opportunities for their children to achieve some degree of Spanish proficiency never arose. Although Elena Torres believed that even a minimal program on the part of the school would be helpful, like the great majority of parents in our larger sample, she gave no indication that she thought that the schools would provide such a program.⁶

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the strategies that parents in three south Texas Mexican-origin families adopted in their attempts to raise their children with at least some degree of bilingualism. Analysis of audio- and videotaped data from intensive home observations combined with structured interviews and children's Spanish and English oral and written language samples suggests that use of the minority language in the greater part of family interactions, along with other favorable factors such as close ties with relatives who are monolingual in the minority language and, perhaps, the relative isolation afforded by a rural environment, is crucial to minority language maintenance and children's development of bilingual proficiency (Fishman, 1991; Klee, 1987; Hakuta & D'Andrea, 1992; Ortiz, 1975). While other strategies on the part of parents to promote their children's bilingual development, such as setting aside a period when the minority language is required or enrolling children in short-term enrichment classes, may avert complete loss of the immigrant language, the experience of families such as the Torreses and the Baezes suggests that such strategies are insufficient if children are to acquire more than the most basic proficiency, even in an area such as south Texas where demographic, geographic, and economic factors would seem to favor bilingualism.

NOTES

1. During home observations, focal children wore belts designed for joggers to carry small personal tape recorders. The children were recorded with SONY D-3 professional tape recorders and SONY D-55 lapel microphones. Although the recorders were occasionally turned off accidentally when children engaged in vigorous physical activity, the combination

generally worked well and enabled us to access a great deal of relatively unmonitored speech. Microphones picked up all utterances of the focal children, including sotto voce self-regulatory remarks, as well as nearly all the speech of others in the immediate vicinity.

2. Esteban and Maria Gómez and all other participant names used in this article are pseudonyms.

3. Luisa Baez described her children's Spanish proficiency as resembling a "staircase," a result of the differing lengths of time they spent with their Spanish monolingual maternal grandmother when they were young.

4. Torres-Ayala (1994) studied the language proficiency of U.S.-born Mexican American college students in San Antonio, many of whom enrolled in Spanish courses in an attempt to reacquire their parents' and grandparents' language. Many of the subjects in her study expressed regret that they had not had greater opportunities to develop their Spanish proficiency when they were younger.

5. According to the 1990 Census Bureau figures, Latinos comprise 56.3 percent of the population of San Antonio.

6. Several Texas-born parents in the larger study discussed their attempts to enroll their children in bilingual programs. The children, who were all proficient in English, were denied admission on the grounds that the bilingual programs were intended solely to provide assistance for limited English proficient students, rather than to assist children with some Spanish to develop their abilities in the minority language.

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