
MIXED SYSTEM 1: A LANGUAGE STRATEGY FOR BILINGUAL FAMILIES

SISTEMA MIXTO 1: UNA ESTRATEGIA LINGÜÍSTICA PARA FAMILIAS BILINGÜES

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According to the literature on family bilingualism, parents raising their children in two languages by choice are recommended to choose from one of these two main language strategies: either One person/parent, one language (OPOL) or Minority Language at Home (ml@h). However, the results of a survey carried out by the author on a group of 110 English-Spanish bilingual families in Madrid showed that the second most popular language strategy after OPOL is another strategy named here as Mixed System 1 (MSI). Therefore, this strategy proves to be interesting to explore in detail, looking at the reasons for its choice as well as the implications and consequences involved, both from a practical and an emotional perspective, for parents as well as for children. Research on the topic and a case study on the group of families that use this method in Madrid are the

main points of this article. A questionnaire was designed in order to collect information about this language strategy and the answers confirmed the effectiveness of Mixed System 1 as an alternative strategy in this particular context.

Keywords: family bilingualism, family language policy, English-Spanish bilingualism, bilingual families language strategies, Mixed language strategy

Según estudios sobre bilingüismo familiar, a los padres que crían a sus hijos en dos idiomas por elección propia se les recomienda elegir una de estas dos estrategias lingüísticas principales: Una persona/padre, una lengua (UPUL) o Lengua minoritaria en el hogar (ml@h). Sin embargo, los resultados de una encuesta realizada por la autora a un grupo de 110 familias bilingües en inglés-español en Madrid mostraron que la segunda estrategia lingüística más popular después de UPUL es otra estrategia denominada aquí Sistema Mixto 1 (SM1). Por lo tanto, esta estrategia resulta de interés para explorarla en detalle, analizando las razones de su elección así como las implicaciones y consecuencias que suponen, tanto desde una perspectiva práctica como emocional, para los padres y los hijos. La investigación sobre el tema y un estudio de caso sobre un grupo de familias que usan este método en Madrid son los puntos principales de este artículo. Se diseñó un cuestionario para recoger información sobre esta estrategia lingüística y las respuestas confirmaron la efectividad del Sistema Mixto 1 como una estrategia alternativa en este contexto en particular.

Palabras clave: bilingüismo familiar, política lingüística familiar, bilingüismo inglés-español, estrategias lingüísticas de familias bilingües, estrategia lingüística mixta

1. Introduction

The main area of research on family bilingualism is Family Language Policy (FLP), which includes the decisions and actions taken by parents who want to bring up their children in more than one language. One of these decisions is which language or languages are to be used within the family

and how. For that purpose, parents must choose the language strategy that suits them best to bring up their children bilingually. Their choice is key as the strategy can shape their degree of bilingualism, making it more or less balanced. Sometimes this choice is not made consciously and parents are not aware of following a certain strategy, although the effects are the same. There are many different language strategies:

One Person, One Language (OPOL): the English-speaking parent generally uses English with the children and the Spanish-speaking parent generally uses Spanish with the children.

Minority Language at Home (ml@h): both parents generally use English with the children, who learn Spanish outside the home.

Mixed-language policy (MLP): both parents generally use both languages with the children in the same conversations, even in the same sentences.

One Person, Two Languages (OP2L): both parents generally use both languages with the children.

Mixed System 1 (MS1): the English-speaking parent generally speaks English and the Spanish-speaking parent uses either English or Spanish with the children.

Mixed System 2 (MS2): the Spanish-speaking parent generally uses Spanish and the English-speaking parent uses either English or Spanish with the children.

However, the two main parental language strategies according to the literature on bilingualism by choice are One Person One Language (OPOL) and Minority Language at Home (ml@h). OPOL is usually the most widely used one, followed by ml@h. Yet, the results of a survey carried out by the author on a group of 110 English-Spanish bilingual families in Madrid, Spain revealed that another *minor* strategy is used by more parents than ml@h. This language strategy was named as *Mixed System 1* (MS1). While 54% of the families followed OPOL, 21% chose MS1 and only 13% decided on ml@h, followed by MS2 (8%), OP2L (3%) and finally, MLP (2%).

In the present study, the aim is to first describe the MS1 strategy, including its presence in the research on the topic and then to carry out a case study on a group of families that follow Mixed System 1 in Madrid in order to explore this strategy in depth. Bilingual family language strategies is an area of sociolinguistics that needs to be explored further (Wei, 2011), so this article intends to contribute to the research in this area of bilingualism which is important for parents raising bilingual children. A study like this, focusing exclusively on the Mixed System 1 strategy, did not seem to have been made at the time in Madrid – or anywhere else. Another aim is to offer a suitable term for this strategy as it does not seem to be one commonly recognised by the authors in the field.

2. The Mixed System 1 Strategy (MS1)

Mixed System (MS) is a bilingual family language strategy defined as a mixture of OPOL and ml@h (Noguchi, 1996), which means that one parent uses only the minority language and the other parent uses both the majority and the minority language with their children (Mixed System 1 in this study - MS1) - or that one parent speaks only the majority language and the other parent speaks both the minority and the majority language (Mixed System 2 in this study - MS2).

In this article, the focus is on English-Spanish bilingual families living in Madrid (Spain) that follow Mixed System 1, that is, families in which the English-speaking parent uses only English with their children while the Spanish-speaking parent uses either Spanish or English. This group of families is much larger than the families following Mixed System 2 (21% of families compared to 8%), according to the survey mentioned above, therefore more significant for the purposes of the present study. In a survey by De Houwer (2007), Mixed System was a strategy used by more than 40% of the participant families.

Mixed System (MS) is a bilingual family language strategy defined as a mixture of OPOL and ml@h (Noguchi 1996), which means that one parent uses only the minority language (ml) and the other parent uses both the majority and the minority language with their children (Mixed System 1 in this study - MS1) - or that one parent speaks only the majority

language (ML) and the other parent speaks both the minority and the majority language (Mixed System 2 in this study - MS2).

There are a series of aspects involved in the decision of adopting and maintaining this language strategy to take into account. These are now described, as well as some implications and consequences, both from a practical and an emotional point of view, for parents and for children. Many of the following sections form the basis of the questions in the questionnaire.

2.1. Possible Reasons for Choosing a Language Strategy

There are both practical and emotional reasons for choosing a language strategy. Some parents choose a language strategy without taking a conscious or informed decision, in a natural way, maybe just taking into account the family circumstances such as their language pattern as a couple, their linguistic abilities or simply their instincts and wishes as a basis for their decision. Others, by contrast, are very aware of the need to provide their children with extra input in the minority language in order to help them become bilingual. Indeed, although there are many factors that lead families to use a certain language strategy which will help children become relatively balanced bilinguals, exposure to and need for the minority language are key (Thordardottir, 2011). Parents must, therefore, decide how to provide both quality and quantity of language exposure (especially to the minority language), mainly through social interaction, depending on the parents' language proficiency and language preferences, as well as the situation of the community where they live. Need is another essential factor to consider, as children should have the need to use both languages, especially the minority language.

2.2. Essential Linguistic Requisites for Parents to Choose The Mixed System 1 Strategy

Majority-language parents interested in using Mixed System 1 at home should have a good command of the minority language as they need to communicate with their children in both languages. They should also

wish to do it and feel comfortable doing so, otherwise this strategy might turn into a different one (either OPOL or ml@h). Regarding the family language, it would be sensible if it was the minority language since it is the only language common to both parents. However, it could be either language or even both, depending on which language(s) the parents would choose to communicate with each other. If they use the minority language, it might be easier to use it with the children too and the children would have greater chances of becoming bilingual, according to De Houwer (2007). Her results showed that 93% of the families where the parents spoke to each other in the minority language had children who spoke in two languages as opposed to 36% of the families where parents spoke to each other in the majority language. Vitale (2011:40) also confirmed that “the languages used between parents determine the level of minority language use by the children”.

2.3. Time of Choice and Long-term Maintenance of The Mixed System 1 Strategy

Some parents choose this strategy from the beginning, since the birth of their children. Others choose it after having had difficulties with other strategies at some turning points in the life of a bilingual family, such as when schooling begins, when siblings arrive or if the majority-language parent decides to use the majority language as well as the minority language, in the case of families using ml@h. The language strategy is certainly put to the test when children become part of society. Thus, many families rethink their strategy in order to adapt it to the new circumstances, since the children’s proficiency in their majority language tends not to be as good as their monolingual peers’ until around the age of 5, even though they usually spend most of their time in a mostly majority-language environment. As remarked by Noguchi (1996:1): “Little attention has been given to the emotional considerations involved in maintaining strategies such as the one person-one language approach or the home/community language system after children begin formal schooling”. It is at this time of change that Mixed System 1 can appear as a compromise between fostering the minority language and allowing children to be comfortably part of the environment where they live as they spend more time away from their

parents. However, it is important to bear in mind that it is believed that the key years for establishing bilingualism and for children to achieve (near-) balanced bilingualism are the pre-school years (Arnberg, 1987).

2.4. Possible Origin Due to a Change of Strategy: from OPOL, ml@h or OP2L to the Mixed System 1 Strategy

As explained above, other strategies can be abandoned in favour of Mixed System 1, both for practical and emotional reasons, especially on the children's part. It is common for them to want to carry on talking in the majority language when they come back home after school, so it can be hard for parents to reinforce the use of the minority language at those times. Also, some children might not want to feel different from the other children and might reject their parents speaking to them or making them speak in the minority language in front of their friends. Homework is another tricky point to deal with, since children might prefer to be helped in the majority language if it is the language they are studying in and so parents might feel forced to oblige.

Barron-Hauwaert (2004), in her study on parents' choice of bilingual family language strategy at home, observed that some families using OPOL ended up changing to a more relaxed *mixed language* policy as they thought it was more realistic (this could mean either MS or the *One person two languages strategy* OP2L). Families following OP2L could also decide to change to Mixed System 1 to increase the input in minority language. However, one disadvantage of a change of strategy to bear in mind could be that the emotional bond between the children and their parent/s might be damaged (Grosjean, 2009).

2.5. The Positive and the Negative Side of The Mixed System 1 Strategy

Mixed System 1, like any other strategy, has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the main advantages is that it allows both parents to bond with their children in their different L1 if they wish to – and/or in the minority language in the case of the majority-language parent. The minority language tends to become the family language, whereas the

majority language is usually only used between the majority-language parent and the children when on their own. By following this strategy, children are able to perceive their parents' *true selves*, as is also true of OPOL and OP2L. Furthermore, with this strategy - as with OP2L - the children have an example of a bilingual person in their majority-language parent. After all, parents are essential models and factors that influence the development of their children's bilingual identity as stated by J. Moore: "Our children will be bilingual and bicultural to the extent that we ourselves are" (Cunningham, 2011).

There are also a series of practical and emotional implications and consequences for parents and children which might lead to a change of strategy.

2.6. Implications for the Majority Language Parent Using The Mixed System 1 Strategy

Majority-language parents must speak to their children in their L2 as well as in their L1, which might involve an extra effort, certainly linguistic but especially emotional, as it might deal with feelings. This could mean a disadvantage for majority-language parents, as some bilingual people feel differently when speaking other languages; they even create different identities or *selves* and might also be perceived differently by others (Koven, 2007). Some parents feel they can only use their L1 as the language of emotions with their children. To further explore this idea, Pavlenko (2004) studied the choices of language made by bilingual parents related to affection and emotion in the interaction with their children to find out what it means for parents to raise their children in their L2. Many parents felt unable to communicate with their children in their L2, regardless of their dominance of the L2 or their initial plan before their children were born. However, Pavlenko was also able to show examples of parents who were happy to use their L2 with their children (and partners) as the language of emotions, especially those parents who felt their L2 had become part of themselves. Therefore, they used either their L1 or L2 indistinctly. Pavlenko's findings justify the choice made by some parents to speak both L1 and L2 to their children without having to lose any emotional connection with them. On the other hand, some majority- language parents might be very happy to

use the minority language with their children because of their proficiency of the language, which they get to practise much more following Mixed System 1 than if they choose OPOL (but not as much as in ml@h).

2.7. Implications for the Minority Language Parent Using The Mixed System 1 Strategy

Another negative implication of Mixed System 1 (but also of OPOL and ml@h) is that minority- language parents might want to use the majority language with the children too as it is the language of the society where they live, of their relatives and friends and possibly of work. Yet, as having the responsibility of being the main providers of input in the minority language, minority- language parents should reject the use of the majority language with their children to help them become balanced bilinguals, even if it is hard to avoid - especially if the children use the majority language to interact with the minority- language parent and or when immersed in a majority- language context (with friends, family). This factor might also turn against the minority- language parent as a learner of L2 as it means not using it as much as it could be used. Should the minority- language parent wish to use the majority language too, the strategy would become either OP2L or MS2, which is another option, although a much less common one according to the results of the previous study, as pointed out above. On the contrary, a possible positive implication for the minority- language parent might be that there is no need to learn to speak the majority language very well if the parent does not wish to do so.

2.8. Implications for the Children Whose Parents Use The Mixed System 1 Strategy

In theory, this strategy requires children to use the minority language with the minority-language parent and either language with the majority-language parent. However, it could happen that children might not like the majority-language parent to use another language apart from the majority language, maybe because it does not seem natural to them: “perceived language emotionality, in particular emotionality of the L1, may affect the overall language choice in parent/child communication” (Pavlenko, 2004:

191). On the other hand, children might not mind their majority-language parent using the minority language with them, especially if it has become the family language or it is at least spoken between the parents.

Alternatively, children might not want the minority- language parent to speak the majority language as it might sound strange to them or they might like the minority- language parent to use the minority language with them as it might sound more real. Furthermore, children might even want both their parents to speak to them exclusively in the majority language if they do not feel very confident with the minority language, especially if they do not have the need or the chance to use the minority language very often. This could happen with any other language strategy and might result in a change to OP2L or MS2.

2.9. Possible Problems of Using the Mixed System 1 Strategy which Could Lead to a Change of Language Strategy

A possible difficulty that the majority-language parent might have to deal with is external, since for most people, the majority-language parent using the minority language with their children is still seen as unnatural. This is probably due to OPOL still being the most popular strategy in many countries (Pearson 2010). Furthermore, as pointed out above, the fact that the majority-language parent, following either Mixed System 1 or ml@h, is also using the minority language to communicate with their children might not please every parent as it might be hard to do. Failure to do so might result in a change to OPOL or another strategy. Since maintaining the same language strategy over time might not be easy, logical or flexible enough for any families, the reverse process can also occur. This means that some families might start using Mixed System 1 and then change to a different strategy for various reasons, some of which have been mentioned above.

2.10. Consistency in the Use of a Language Strategy

Consistency is one of the keys to the success of any language strategy in bringing up bilingual children (Takeuchi, 2006). Parents should be

as consistent as possible in their use of language/s so that children have a pattern to follow and the strategy has the desired effect. In his study, Sánchez Torres (2010: 252) showed that only 46,7% of the families were “consistent” as well as “strict and systematic” in their use of the method. However, it is important to be aware that parents choose a certain strategy but in some cases they are actually using a different one since it can be very hard to follow it in a strict way (Goodz, 1994).

2.11. Effect on the Children’s Degree of Bilingualism

The consequences of using Mixed System 1 on the children’s degree of bilingualism can either be positive or negative. On one hand, the children receive more input in the minority language, which should lead to a more active ability in the minority language and, as a result, a more balanced bilingualism. With Mixed System 1 there might be more chances of that happening than with OPOL, for instance. Also, as pointed out above, if the family language is usually the minority language - or at least if the parents use the minority language with each other - the children witness interaction in only one language, the minority language, which is a good source of input for them, even if they do not use the minority language actively themselves. On the other hand, children might not feel the need to use the minority language with their majority-language parent since they know s/he speaks the majority language too. What is more, they might not even feel the need to use the minority language with the minority- language parent either if they know s/he speaks the majority language. Therefore, children in Mixed System 1 families might still decide to communicate in the majority language regardless of the amount of input they receive in their minority language, especially if they feel it is their dominant language, which might result in a more passive type of bilingualism. This could happen with any other language strategy. After all, children are very practical, so they often decide which languages to use, when and who with, as pointed out above.

Regarding the effectiveness of this strategy, in a study by De Houwer (2007), the most successful language strategy in terms of rates of bilingual success was Minority Language at Home (success rate of 96.92%), closely followed by Mixed System 1 (93.42%). Less successful are One Person,

Two Languages (79.18%), One Person, One Language (74.24%) and finally, Mixed System 2 (35.70%). According to these results, it could be concluded that the more exposed the children are to the minority language, the more chances of succeeding they have. As well as De Houwer (2007), several researchers show how the *mixed systems*, usually Mixed System 1 and OP2L, are often the most successful language strategies. Yamamoto (2002), for instance, also found out that *mixed systems* were much more popular than OPOL and also more successful in the number of active bilingual children. In fact, in her study, parents who spoke to each other in the minority language had a 100% success rate of children who spoke in two languages, whereas those who spoke in the majority language only had 59%. She therefore suggests to encourage the maximum engagement with the minority language so a strategy such as Mixed System 1 seems more useful when trying to bring up children in two languages.

However, language strategies do not guarantee successful bilingualism on their own as there are other strategies to take into account, especially the discourse strategies described in Lanza (1997). For this author, successful families follow the language strategy of one parent using both the minority language and the majority language (Mixed System 1) as well as the discourse strategy consisting of one parent who strictly enforces the speaking of the minority language with the children.

In conclusion, as pointed out above, in order to determine how successful a language strategy is, it is important to study the way in which it incorporates the two key elements: exposure to and need for the minority language. Different families tend to have their different ways of ensuring these elements so it is difficult to generalise about the effect of any of the language strategies available since there are many other aspects to consider.

2.12. Summary and Conclusions

As it has been described, Mixed System 1 cannot be chosen by just any bilingual families. However, it seems like a valid alternative to stricter methods, either from the beginning or when difficulties arise with other strategies. Parents might decide to change the strategy to Mixed System 1 to increase input on the minority language (OPOL parents), to introduce

the use of the majority language by the majority-language parent (ml@h parents) or to restrict the use of the majority language by the minority-language parent (OP2L parents). The Mixed System 1 strategy can be therefore considered to be a sensible choice, both from a practical and an emotional point of view, as it allows each parent to use their mother tongue yet the focus, as a family, can still be on the minority language so the children can receive enough input in the language they are trying to develop.

In this sense, Mixed System 2 can also be an alternative to OPOL if the minority-language parent wishes to use the majority language too, yet the amount of input in minority language can decrease. OP2L can also be an alternative to other strategies if both parents want to speak both languages, yet, again, the input in minority language might not be enough. Therefore, overall, Mixed System 1 seems quite an effective strategy according to research.

2.13. A Language Strategy in Need of a Term

In 1996, Noguchi found that, apart from OPOL and ml@h, there were other strategies such as the one of *the English-speaking parent speaking only English and the Japanese speaker using both*, without using a specific term for it. Barron-Hauwaert (2004), in her classification of strategies for language use within the family, includes a strategy called OPOL-mL, which means the minority language is supported by the majority-language parent. This would be the equivalent to Mixed System 1. For her, when OPOL derives into mixing, it does not mean it is not a successful strategy anymore, as it only becomes a different strategy. She also mentions OPOL families who choose to mix according to topic and when with majority-language speakers, involving the minority-language parent speaking the majority language, which makes OPOL turn into Mixed System 2. She calls it OPOL-ML, where majority language is strongest. She then uses the term *Mixed Strategy* to refer to families that live in bilingual areas, which was called *Mixed-Language Policy* by Romaine (1995).

Pearson (2010) mentions *a hybrid system* where one parent speaks one language to the children and the other parent speaks that language and

another one with them. This is a good definition for the Mixed System strategy but it does not specify who speaks which languages, in other words, it does not distinguish between Mixed System 1 and Mixed System 2, which are quite different from each other as described above.

Indeed, Mixed System (1 or 2) is considered to be part of a group sometimes called *mixture of strategies* (Rosenback, 2014). As Noguchi (1996) points out, handbooks on family bilingualism focus solely on rigid use of either OPOL or ml@h as well as several *variations* of these methods. It seems that Mixed System, with its status of a *variation* or *mixture* of other methods is deprived of a name so this impedes its recognition in the literature. In fact, for some authors, Mixed System is non-existent. Baker (2007), for example, describes only four strategies: OPOL, ml@h, MLP and *minority language for the first 3 years, then include the majority language* (which could be considered as ml@h turning into Mixed System 1).

In conclusion, a term for this strategy does not seem to exist yet. Furthermore, there seems to be a need for uniformity in the terminology used to describe, not just the Mixed System strategies, but all the different types of language strategies in order to facilitate the understanding of the literature by both experts and parents who might want to do some research on this topic. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to this gap by offering the following terms: Mixed System (MS), Mixed System 1 (MS1) and Mixed System 2 (MS2).

3. Case Study

3.1. Research question

There does not seem to be a clear description of the Mixed System 1 strategy in the literature on the subject, although this strategy was recognised by many families in the survey mentioned above. Therefore, the research question in this study was:

1. What are the characteristics of the Mixed System 1 strategy?

Many hypotheses might be established, as shown in section 2 of this

study. In order to test them, parents' opinions on this strategy were needed. Consequently, the aim of the study was to ascertain these theoretical assumptions about Mixed System 1 by asking some families who use this strategy to raise their children bilingually in Madrid.

3.2. Method

A qualitative methodology was used to carry out the study, which consisted of a questionnaire containing 10 questions, some closed and some open-ended. Using some ideas from the questionnaire in Barron- Hauwaert (2004), it was designed to collect information about the Mixed System 1 strategy from the families that use it. With this method, the parents were able to offer their views on the subject in detail. It was written in English, although Spanish was also allowed for parents to answer the open-ended questions in the survey in either language. A pilot study was carried out before to validate the questionnaire as regards comprehensibility. The study was conducted via the Internet through the online data collection tool *Google Forms* in order to make it easier to contact all the participating families. These families had already taken part in a previous study so they all fitted the profile required: English-Spanish bilingual families that use Mixed System 1 in Madrid with children aged 0-18 who had been born in Madrid and were still living in Madrid at the time of the study. Being the capital city of Spain, Madrid attracts a large number of English-speakers, mostly to teach English, some of who settle down here with Spanish-speaking partners. Therefore, in these families, one of the parents is a native English speaker and the other one a native Spanish speaker. Although fifteen families were contacted to complete the survey, only ten families answered, with a total number of 19 children (2 families have only one child, 1 has three and 7 have two). All families participated voluntarily. The families remain anonymous and are named F1 to F10.

3.3. Questionnaire

The different aspects of Mixed System 1 discussed in section 2 form the basis for the questions included in the questionnaire.

Question 1 (Q1). What languages do you generally use within your family?

First of all, it is important to find out the language patterns followed by each family in order to have a better picture of how the language strategy fits the linguistic preference of the family. The different languages used by the different family members provide an essential insight of the home uses. It would make sense if these families put the focus on the minority language (English), as the main reason behind the Spanish-speaking parent using English with the children is to support the English-speaking parent in their quest to help their children speak English. Therefore, but not necessarily, the main language of communication between the parents - the so called *family language* - is expected to be English.

Another significant matter is the choice of language made by the children to address their parents, both separately and together, which would throw some light about the children's opinion of this strategy (Q6) and its effectiveness (Q10). Also, in the case of siblings, it is interesting to see which language/s they use between them.

Question 2 (Q2). When and why did you start using the Mixed System 1 strategy?

Question 3 (Q3). If you have not always used the Mixed System 1 strategy, which strategy did you use before and why?

These two questions deal with long-term maintenance of the strategy, including any changes of strategy involved as well as reasons for the change. Learning about the time when this strategy is first used can be very helpful to explore its origin. Some parents choose this strategy before or when their children are born whereas other start using a different strategy, then change to Mixed System 1. By contrast, some parents choose this strategy around the time schooling starts, which means that a previous strategy (OPOL, ml@h or OP2L) has been abandoned in favour of Mixed System 1. This could support the idea that Mixed System 1 is the result of giving up other previous strategies, becoming a more flexible choice for bilingual families. There could be many reasons why families might want to change to this strategy depending on which method they used before. Therefore, it could be interesting to find out which strategies parents use previously and why.

Question 4 (Q4). Spanish-speaking parent, are you happy personally using both Spanish and English with your children? Why/why not?

Question 5 (Q5). English-speaking parent, are you happy using only/mostly English with your children? Why/why not?

These two questions deal with the degree of satisfaction parents have with this strategy as well as their reasons for their answers. Every language strategy has its advantages and disadvantages, so it is necessary to ask the families for their own impressions, first as separate members of the family, then as a family (see Q7). In this strategy, the majority-language parents use a second language to address their children whereas the minority-language parents only use their mother tongue. What are their feelings about this pattern?

Question 6 (Q6). Do you think your children are happy with this strategy (having two languages in their lives)? Yes/no; why/why not?

Children obviously play a key role in maintaining a language strategy. Sometimes if they do not agree with it they find their own strategy to be able to cope with bilingualism (i.e., replying in a different language, for instance), even forcing parents to change the strategy themselves. In some cases, children are the ones who decide the home language (Piller, 2001; Tuominen, 1999). Therefore, it was important to ask parents about their children's feelings as well as the reasons why they liked or did not like the Mixed System 1 strategy. In this sense, the language children use to speak to their parents (Q1) could be connected with this question.

Question 7 (Q7). Do you have any problems or difficulties using this strategy? Yes/no; which ones?

Is it an easy or a complicated method to follow? Does it feel natural or artificial to carry out? Parents might encounter certain difficulties in using this strategy and it is important to find out which ones to check if there are any common problems.

Question 8 (Q8). If you (or your children) are not happy with the Mixed System 1 strategy, would you like to change it? If so, which language strategy would you like to use (OPOL, ml@h, OP2L...)? Why?

This question is for those families that might not be enjoying this strategy and might be considering a different one - if any. Thus, they were asked the reasons for the possible change as well as the alternative and their reasons for choosing a different one. This could offer the opposite idea to Q3, parents transitioning from Mixed System 1 to OPOL, ml@h or OP2L instead of the other way round.

Question 9 (Q9). Are you consistent in your use of the strategy?

A question on consistency, although difficult to measure since it depends on the parents' perception, seemed necessary as it also illustrates how conscious parents are, separately, about the task they have in hand.

Question 10 (Q10). Do you think the Mixed System 1 strategy has a positive effect on your children's degree of bilingualism? (so far and according to your own observations)

Finally, the last question is aimed at measuring the effectiveness of a strategy, which could require other methods which are not used in this study. However, it has been concluded before that parents are often the best judges of their children's bilingual ability (Gutiérrez-Clellen and Kreitzer, 2003). Therefore, it is interesting to ask parents what they think the effect of the Mixed System 1 strategy on their children's bilingualism is so far, in order to have more information about their opinion of this strategy. Many other factors certainly influence the achievement of balanced bilingualism, such as discourse strategies (Lanza, 1997) so these answers are not, by any means, a determining factor, but only a contributing one. They merely confirm the parents' answers to Q6, whether they like this strategy for their children or not and if they are happy with the results.

Comments

At the end of the questionnaire, parents have a chance to write any other information they might consider relevant to the use of this strategy.

4. Results and Discussion

The questionnaire started with questions about the number of children and their age. However, the answers to the different questions (except Q1 and Q10) were analysed per family, regardless of the number of children, as they all followed the same language patterns. In fact, it was confirmed that there are no families where either the father or the mother uses different languages with different children. As for the children's age, it was only used when considered necessary to explain certain answers.

In general, the answers to the research questions seem to corroborate the theory behind them, described above, in section 2 and they also add new information concerning several aspects of the Mixed System 1 strategy as shown in this next section.

1. Question 1 (Q1). What languages do you generally use within your family?

There is, as expected, a variety of language patterns used by the 10 participating families (English, Spanish and a mixture of the two), 7 of which consist of native English-speaking fathers/native Spanish-speaking mothers and 3 of native English-speaking mothers/native Spanish-speaking fathers. As observed in Ruiz Martín (2016), the Mixed System 1 strategy seems to be usually favoured by Spanish-speaking mothers who are able to and wish to speak in English with their children.

In the communication between parents, when the mother addresses the father, 6 mothers use a mixture and 4 mostly English. Unexpectedly, only one of the 3 native English speaking mothers are within these 4. On the other hand, when the father addresses the mother, 6 fathers use mostly English (2 are native Spanish-speaking) and 4 fathers use a mixture. No mother or father uses mostly Spanish when talking to their partner. These results show that, within each couple, the main language seems to be mostly English with some Spanish. This could have mirrored the combination of languages used by their children, but in reality it did not, as explained in the following paragraph. It is also surprising to observe that sometimes the Spanish speakers are the ones who have chosen to speak in English with their English-speaking partners, rather than the native English speaker.

In the communication mother-children, the results are quite even: 3 mothers use mostly English (30%, the 3 English-speaking mothers), 4 mothers use mostly Spanish (40%) and 3 mothers use a mixture of both languages (30%). In return, their children choose to communicate with them mostly in Spanish (60%), using a mixture (30%) and, interestingly, only 10% mostly in English (family number 8 (F8), with an English-speaking mother, despite there being two other mothers who speak mostly in English to their children).

As for the communication father-children, there is, again, a correlation between the number of English-speaking fathers and the number of fathers who speak mostly in English to their children as all 7 of them do. This shows how committed both these mothers and fathers seem to be to the use of this strategy, which means they have to be strict in their use of English with their children.

However, the children respond differently, once again, as most of them (4) use mostly Spanish with their fathers (from 2 Spanish-speaking fathers and 2 English-speaking fathers), only 3 use English back (logically, from 3 English-speaking fathers) and 3 use a mixture (from 2 English-speaking fathers and 1 English-speaking mother).

Therefore, in general, children seem to prefer communication with their parents mostly in Spanish, or a mixture, even with their English-speaking parents (F4, Q5: “My children know that English is the best language to use with me but that I’m happy to chat in Spanish”). This might seem quite disappointing (section 2.8.), especially as parents seem to be very consistent in their use of the strategy (see answers to Q9, below). Yet some parents seem to understand their children’s choices (F4, Q5: “Experiences he has lived in Spanish with high emotions lose a lot of their joy and excitement if translated into English for me”).

When the parents address the children as a couple, the results change, once again. Logically, most couples (6) use a mixture whereas 4 of them use mostly English (3 English-speaking fathers, 1 English-speaking mother) and none use mostly Spanish. The children respond accordingly by using a mixture (6), yet none use mostly English and 4 use mostly

Spanish (coincidentally, 3 from the couples that use mostly English with them), which could very well be interpreted as a sign of rebelliousness, a rejection of bilingualism or simply being practical. As pointed out above (section 2.1.) children are aware of their parents' language preferences but they choose to follow their own rules (Piller, 2001).

However, parents consider their children to be bilingual at the end of the questionnaire. The reality is that these children live in linguistic immersion surrounded by Spanish most of the time. This circumstance might make it difficult for the children to communicate in English with their parents when they do not have a real need for it as they know their parents understand Spanish too, so the children tend not to make the effort. However, the fact that these children do not communicate in English at home does not mean that they cannot do so with other native speakers of English, as confirmed later by the parents. They are, after all, receiving a great amount of input in English at home which allows them to use English whenever they need to or want to (section 2.11.).

In families with more than one child, children communicate between them mostly in Spanish (4), using a mixture (3) and even one in English (F9, who spent some time living in Australia). In Q5, F8 comments: "They (the children) often speak English amongst themselves (though less now as they get older)". In fact, there are studies that show that the presence of siblings has an effect on the children's level of bilingualism (Barron-Hauwaert, 2011) as children tend to communicate between them in the language in which they are more skilled, usually the majority language.

On the other hand, what the families perceive as the family language is either a mixture (5) or mostly English (4, out of which 2 have only children), which is quite an even result. With the exception of one family that surprisingly uses mostly Spanish (F4, English-speaking mother), these results can be regarded as consistent with the Mixed System 1 strategy, as it accommodates both languages within the family, even if English is given more support than Spanish. However, as pointed out above, if contrasted with the children's use of English with their parents, the chosen family language might be regarded more as a wish than a fact. Interestingly, only two of the families that claim English to be their family language

actually speak to each other in English. Contrarily, the 2 other couples who also use English with each other, regard their family language as a mixture. In conclusion and in theory, according to research (section 2.2.), the families that use mostly English have more chances of succeeding in raising balanced bilingual children.

2. Question 2 (Q2). When and why did you start using the Mixed System 1 strategy?

3. Question 3 (Q3). If you have not always used the Mixed System 1 strategy, which strategy did you use before and why?

Most families (70%) started using Mixed System 1 with their children since their birth. Only 20% of the families started later (2-5 years old) and 10% of the families started much later (6-12 years old). The families that chose this strategy from the very beginning argued logical reasons: “common sense” (F4), “more natural” (F3), “mother not confident enough in English to do ml@h” (F10), “for the children to hear English everyday” (F6), “English is the non-dominant language and couple’s language is English” (F2), “mother is native speaker of English, looked after children and home language became English so father started supporting English too” (F8) and “speak English to compensate (living in Spain)” (F9). It could be concluded, therefore, that English plays an important role in these families and that might have been the reason why they chose Mixed System 1 from the beginning.

One of the two families who started Mixed System 1 at 2-5 years old (F1) had previously followed ml@h to give their children as much exposure to English as possible, but changed it because they were concerned their children would not reach an adequate level of Spanish before starting school at 3 years old (section 2.3.). The other family tried OPOL first, which did not work with their first child as the Spanish context made the English-speaking father speak in Spanish too, so they tried OP2L as well. Three other families started off with OPOL as it had been either recommended by other bilingual families or seemed the most natural strategy. Lastly, F7 began using Mixed System 1 at 6-12 years old because their child “would speak in English only with his British father until Primary School” and

the Spanish mother also wanted to communicate in English with her child. Emotional reasons, as shown here and in section 2.3 are also very powerful and can determine a change of language strategy.

In conclusion, as it emerges from the data, Mixed System 1 was a good choice for most families and a good alternative to other strategies which, for different reasons, were not suitable for these families (section 2.4.). Furthermore, the answers from all these families show that they are aware of using a system in order to help their children become bilingual (section 2.1.).

4. Question 4 (Q4). Spanish- speaking parent, are you happy personally using both Spanish and English with your children? Why/why not?

When asking the native Spanish-speaking parents whether they were happy speaking both Spanish and English with their children, the general answer is very positive (section 2.5.) 67% feel very happy and 33% quite happy. The reasons can be classified in two groups: individual preferences (“Sometimes I don’t fancy using English” (F1), “I speak whatever I feel like speaking” (F2), “I do love English” (F5), “I teach English” (F5 and F9), “I get to practise” (F8)) and responsibility (“More than one parent using the minority language encourages the children to speak it” (F6), “English is a huge part of who our children are” (F8), “English is a global language” (F8), “It feels more natural to speak in Spanish but it is important to support the minority language” (F10), “It makes the conversation more fluent” (F7)). Sometimes the parent can even feel responsible for the negative effects: “However, the girls pick up my mispronunciations” (F9). As can be observed, some of these answers reflect the effort these parents, being aware of the benefits, make to speak their second language with their children (section 2.6.). Their support role is one of the requisites for Mixed System 1 and, interestingly, no parents mention being criticised for using English with their children, unless they only do it when at home (section 2.9.).

5. Question 5 (Q5). English-speaking parent, are you happy using only/ mostly English with your children? Why/why not?

The native English-speaking parents are equally happy speaking

only or mostly English with their children: 50% are very happy and 50% quite happy. They feel it is natural and spontaneous and it allows them to give “maximum exposure to English to the children” (F1). Thus, the children get “the edge”, can communicate with their English-speaking relatives, “It has helped the depth and breadth of their vocabulary, allowing them to access English literature more confidently” and might also have “the possibility of future study in Ireland or the U.K.” (F8). However, one father feels that it stops him from practising his Spanish (F6) and one mother (F4) admits that she is happy to use Spanish sometimes to help with homework or to listen to her children using the majority language to express their everyday experiences (even though they would use English with their English grandparents). Another father feels overwhelmed by Spanish and his wife’s use of it and would rather follow ml@h: “I can have the children in a strong English practising moment, in which they are speaking to each other in English and to me, but as soon as Mum comes in the door it dissipates completely and I struggle to get it back again” (F10). Similarly, one mother feels her child is “more confused because my husband mixes the languages a lot and she doesn’t have a clear model” (F3). In conclusion, it is clear that these parents are aware of their role of responsibility regarding their children’s bilingual upbringing yet speaking only in English does not seem to be an easy task for all them (section 2.7.).

6. Question 6 (Q6). Do you think your children are happy with this strategy (having two languages in their lives? Yes/no; why/why not?)

According to their parents, most children also seem to be either very happy (70%) or quite happy (30%) to be brought up in two languages with this particular strategy. Three families state their children are proud of being bilingual and are eager to speak and read English and have two worlds to choose from. Two families point out that their children realise the advantages. In one case, this is especially true as they grow older, even though “They have refused to speak one of the languages to friends visiting or if they were feeling observed” (F9). In the other case, they are conscious of the positive side of English, yet they find it easier to speak in Spanish (F1). F4 states that “They don’t see English as a burden (unlike other children whose parents use strict OPOL)”. Other children even favour watching films in English over Spanish (F6). The only exception is one of

the children (F2) who is still struggling to speak either language as she is only 3 and might still be in an early phase of bilingualism.

It is interesting to highlight that no families mentioned their children being unhappy with their parents communicating in English with them even though, as shown above, most of the children resort to choosing Spanish to communicate (Q1). It is assumed, therefore, that there are not major communication problems and the children agree with this bilingual communication system.

7. Question 7 (Q7). Do you have any problems or difficulties using this strategy? Yes/no; which ones?

As with any other strategies, the majority of these families (9 out of 10) have had some problems or difficulties using the Mixed System 1 strategy (section 2.9.). As described above, the young 3 year old “is finding it more difficult to communicate in either language” (F2) since the child is probably still going through the *language differentiation* period and so learning to separate both languages (Barron-Hauwaert 2004). Other children do not speak to their parents in English. Regarding the parents’ use of Spanish, families feel that this strategy “is more difficult to keep when socialising with Spanish-speaking parents” (F5) or “the in-laws are in the house every day at some point” (F6), which puts pressure on the parents to speak Spanish. One English-speaking mother finds herself “saying important messages in Spanish just to make sure they have understood” (F4) when concerning school or another Spanish-speaking environment and considers it an error on her part as she should trust their ability to receive and process the message in English. F8 is concerned with the possibility that people might question “*why their dad speaks to them in Spanish part of the time*”. One of the mothers worries that “the native English-speaking parent is not learning Spanish as much as he should” (F7) so she feels she is not helping her partner by using this strategy. F10 reflects on the occasional mixing of languages “but both parents are competent on both languages so it is not too complicated”. They also believe that “with the mixed system, the second child comes out less strong, whereas the ml@h system might protect their English moments more by forcing them more to speak English with their sibling”. In conclusion, all families seem to

struggle to counteract the overwhelming effect of the majority language, which is understandable, given the monolingual context they have to deal with. The apparent lack of similar surveys on the Mixed System 1 strategy makes it difficult to compare these results to other surveys. However, Noguchi (1996:252) reports similar concerns from families using the closest strategy to MS1, which is the Home/Community language strategy.

8. Question 8 (Q8). If you (or your children) are not happy with the Mixed System 1 strategy, would you like to change it? If so, which language strategy would you like to use (OPOL, ml@h, OP2L...)? Why?

F10 is the only family that would like to change strategy (section 2.9.) and follow ml@h instead of Mixed System 1 for the reasons stated above. All the other families (90%), despite having some difficulties, would not choose to change it as shown in the answers to this question. Therefore, Mixed System 1 can be regarded as quite a satisfactory strategy according to these families.

9. Question 9 (Q9). Are you consistent in your use of the strategy?

Regarding the consistency in the parents' use of the strategy (section 2.10.), half the number of mothers and fathers feel they are very consistent (50%), 3 mothers (30%) and 4 fathers (40%) state that they are quite consistent and 2 mothers (20%) and 1 father (10%) think that they are consistent enough. These are very positive and balanced results which show that these families seem to be conscious of the strategy they are using and the importance of the way in which they are following it, for the benefit of their children. Interestingly, there are differences between both parents in the families that could be interpreted as what each of them wanted the other to do. It is not an easy task for the parents to reach an agreement, as previously observed. Each one might have a different view and/or feelings about the strategy, yet they need to compromise in order to help their children as best as they can.

10. Question 10 (Q10). Do you think the Mixed System 1 strategy is having a positive effect on your children's degree of bilingualism? (so far and according to your own observations)-

Even though Mixed System 1 does not seem to be ideal for all cases and circumstances, the vast majority of the families (90%) feel this strategy is having a positive effect on their children's development of bilingualism, so far and according to their observations (section 2.11.). These results, which have been obtained by trusting the parents' perceptions, seem to confirm the families' satisfaction with the strategy shown in earlier questions. Even F10, who would prefer to use ml@h, admits that Mixed System 1 works for them. Only 1 family (10%) feels it is not adequate for them (F3), probably due to the early stage the child is in, as explained above. When asked to specify their children's level of bilingualism, parents state that most of the children (16 out of 19, 84%) "understand and speak English and Spanish", 1 child (aged 0-2) "seems to understand both languages but doesn't speak either language yet", and 2 children "understand and speak Spanish. Understand English but don't speak it". One is the child from F3 (aged 3) and the other one is, surprisingly, a 7 year old whose mother believes that "the relationship children have with one parent affects the motivation to speak the second language more than the approach used" (F5). The other child in this family understands and speaks both languages, therefore, personal relationships should also be taken into consideration when studying family bilingualism.

Ultimately, and most importantly, 16 of these 19 children (84%) are bilingual at the moment, according to their parents, and the other 3 (16%) could well be on their way, which is what their parents intend to achieve, not without effort or difficulties of various types, as the answers to the different questions have shown. Therefore, it can be concluded that Mixed System 1 is a strategy that works in this context and for this kind of families and can be recommended for similar cases as an effective alternative to the more popular strategies, such as OPOL or ml@h. As one of the mothers states: "I also know OPOL families with children that struggle to talk in English, especially among peers, because English isn't a language they are comfortable with" (F4). Mixed System 1 might be the balance that many bilingual families are looking for. F6 also observed that children in other bilingual families "understand but are shy, embarrassed or don't feel comfortable using the language". The father's solution, in his own words: "I really believe this system makes the children more confident and seeing both parents speak the minority language highlights to the child

the importance of the second language”. The real advantage of Mixed System 1 is that the Spanish-speaking parent can also use Spanish with the children, so that both parents’ linguistic preferences are respected.

Comments from parents

Some interesting implications can be derived from the comments some parents made at the end of the questionnaire. For instance, a Spanish-speaking mother admits that she is “finding it increasingly difficult to speak in English to the children because they don’t reply in English. However, the children seem quite happy to use English for fun activities” (F1). A possible explanation for this can be that, since Spanish is the language used in everyday life, English can sometimes be assigned to fun aspects such as films, music and games. This is not negative as it helps develop their English, yet it is understandable that, for the parents who do not get a response in the language they are using with their children, especially if it is their second language, this situation can prove discouraging. Another mother points out that she believes taking her children to a bilingual school has helped them become more fluent than other children from other Mixed System 1 families (F4). Schooling is another factor to take into account when bringing up bilingual children and can be the subject of further research.

5. Conclusions

In order to answer the research question “What are the characteristics of the Mixed System 1 strategy?”, this study has described this strategy, present in other studies with different names, in detail: its origins, characteristics, requirements, time and reasons for choice, implications, possible problems and effects on bilingualism. The results of the questionnaire designed to analyse all those aspects of Mixed System 1 showed that it is a valid and effective strategy for the upbringing of bilingual children, as confirmed by the participating families. These results constitute the most interesting finding in the study as they support previous studies described above (De Houwer, 2007; Yamamoto 2002). Future research could measure the effectiveness of the strategy using more objective methods and similar questionnaires could be carried out in different contexts in order to confirm

these results. Other possibilities proposed throughout the article include the analysis of personal relationships, number of siblings and effect of schooling.

Even though the number of participating families was not as large as it would have been desired, this study can be regarded as valid research to contribute to this area of bilingualism due to the novelty and quality of the information extracted from their answers. It is also important to be aware that these families are still going through the process of helping their children become bilingual so their answers were given at a specific point of the process and might vary if the study were to be carried out at a different time. All in all, this article will hopefully be useful for both researchers and parents and it will contribute to the acceptance of the term suggested here, Mixed System, in the area of family bilingualism, which as a system for raising bilingual families, would make its use and research an easier task. The general perception seems to be that bilingualism, “one of the greatest gifts we can give to our children” according to one of the parents in the study (F6), happens naturally. However, how much effort, compromise, perseverance and consistency there is in the use of any strategy, only bilingual families know, as this study shows.

Although not free from difficulties, most families chose Mixed System 1 from the beginning and would not like to change it as both the parents and the children seem to be happy with their bilingual homes. Surprisingly, very few of them actually use English at home with their parents, yet it is important to remember that exposure and need are the main elements of a language strategy for bilingual families (section 2.11.). Mixed System 1 is a useful strategy in terms of exposure to the ml while respecting both parents’ mother tongues. Nevertheless, creating the need for the children to speak it at home is the real challenge for most families, especially if they do not manage to do it during the first few years of their children’s lives (section 2.3.). In fact, it is essential to highlight that these family language strategies do not work on their own but in conjunction with other discourse strategies and techniques (section 2.11.) that were not the object of this study. Therefore, analysing the different types of strategies would offer a much more complete picture of these bilingual families and this study could be a good starting point to achieve that.

To conclude, the choice of strategies to bring up bilingual children seems to be perceived as quite limited to this day, consequently, it is expected that Mixed Strategy 1 could be acknowledged in the literature of family bilingualism as a valid and important strategy. It can also help many families to raise bilingual children and can be the object of further research.-

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