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“All Colors and Hues”: An Autoethnography of a Multiethnic Family’s Strategies for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism

This two-year autoethnographic action research study explores the processes a multiethnic/multiracial family uses to maintain their children’s heritage language of Spanish and the family’s multiculturalism. Data sources (including interviews and participant observations in the home and the dual-language school) specifically focus on the eldest child, Nelia, from her kindergarten and first-grade years where she attended a public dual-language program. The findings illuminate the integral link between the family’s ideology toward valuing bilingualism and the necessity of school support.

Today’s United States is increasingly heterogeneous. As more children are born into families with differing languages, heritages, and backgrounds, many of our long-standing socially constructed identity markers like native language, race, and ethnicity are increasingly blurred and challenged (Luke & Luke, 1999). Lee and Bean

(2010) have used the term “ethnoracial” to identify White multiracial and non-White multiracial groups. Although there has been an increase in ethnoracial diversity, intermarriages, and the number of multiethnic children, too many U.S. schools continue to cling to outdated policies and practices serving an ever-shrinking “mainstream.” One way for our nation’s schools to thoughtfully consider how issues related to heritage language play out in educational policies and practices (e.g., bilingual education, English as a second language, and heritage language programs) is to understand how multiethnic and multiracial bilingual families counter the dominance of English with strategies to successfully value and promote bilingualism in their homes.

As a sociologist and an educator, I (first author, Kim) share a common curiosity in the area of language acquisition with my co-researcher, Harriett. I am not only a bilingual educator but also an insider as the mother of the multiracial, bilingual children presented in this ethnographic study. Harriett is an outsider with an expertise in early bilingual language acquisition and Hispanic families. Together we worked closely on a 2-year ethnographic study to examine the developing Spanish-English bilingualism of my two daughters whose parents occupy different socially constructed identity markers in terms of ethnicity, race, immigrant status, socioeconomic backgrounds, and native language. Although

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this bilingual (English and Spanish) family is middle-class now, the father, an Afro-Colombian immigrant, grew up in a working-class, poor family in a small town in Colombia and was the first in his family to graduate from college. The mother is a U.S.-born, White, native English speaker from a middle-class background. Although the middle-class position this family now occupies offers many advantages in maintaining bilingualism, which we address in this article, the struggles they encountered to promote their home language, the biracial identity of their children, and their multiculturalism are faced by many working-class and low-income families as well.

This family's blendedness is a testament to the increasingly diverse cultural dimensions of U.S. families and how issues of heritage language maintenance play out in complex and individual ways across different socioeconomic groups. Despite social capital acquired by virtue of educational and class status that enabled the parents featured here to successfully negotiate school policies for placement in bilingual programs, the challenges faced by this family highlight the societal and educational barriers to valuing bilingualism and biculturalism and maintaining a heritage language. The experiences of this family also illustrate processes that help support bilingualism and biculturalism both in the home and school settings, processes that are applicable to families of all socioeconomic levels.

HERITAGE LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

Subtractive Bilingualism: Framing Bilingualism as a Problem

Numerous educational policies and practices in Anglo-centric countries, like the United States, tend to frame bilingualism as an educational barrier for children who speak languages other than English (Martinez-Roldán & Malavé, 2004). Proponents of English-only policies and practices often tout a shift to English monolingualism as the most desirable outcome for children, as evidenced in the dismantling of bilingual education programs in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts since 1998 (Ovando, Combs, & Collier, 2006; Wright, 2005). This shift to English comes at the expense, or loss, of one's native language, a process known as "subtractive bilingualism" (Lambert, 1975).

Research demonstrates that children in bilingual households who attend school in the United States learn social English within 1 to 3 years (Ovando et al., 2006), often quickly losing their heritage languages (Peele, 2000; Rumbaut, Massey, & Bean, 2006; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). Indeed, heritage language maintenance is clearly the exception rather than the norm in the U.S. context (Klee, 2011). With language shift, the language loss that may follow represents a loss of "more crucial core values" and a part of one's identity that is associated with cultural and ethnic groups (Lanza & Svendsen, 2007). For example, Hurtado and Vega (2004) found that language shift from Spanish to English among Latino descendants is most pronounced across generations, with many third-generation youth understanding some Spanish but unable to speak it. Valdés (2011) demonstrated that third-generation Latino youth have less exposure to Spanish heritage at home and in the community than earlier generations. Moreover, high school options for heritage language speakers to study Spanish are limited, raising issues of heritage language literacy and advanced vocabulary. Even among Latino American second-generation students—the group most prone to preserve their parents' linguistic heritage—less than half are fluent bilinguals (Portes & Hao, 1998).

Even within transitional bilingual education programs (the most common types of bilingual education programs), subtractive bilingualism occurs (Lambert, 1975) because transitioning children to all English instruction takes precedence over developing strong bilingualism and biliteracy. Much of the literature (Ovando et al., 2006; Wong Fillmore, 1991) discusses the subtractive nature of transitional bilingual programs, where neither language is developed to its full potential. Many factors contribute to this subtractive bilingualism, including an unrealistic push for children to transition as quickly as possible to English (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Guerrero, 2004), the remedial nature of the majority of bilingual education programs in the United States (Valenzuela, 1999), and the dominance of English in U.S. school programs (García, 2011; Shannon, 1995; Valdés, 2011). The shift to English stems largely from policies and practices, both formal and informal, that devalue and marginalize other languages in the United States and in other English-dominant countries (Alba & Nee, 2003; Klee, 2011; Portes

& Hao, 1998; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2005; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001).

Additive Bilingualism: Framing Bilingualism as a Resource

Despite the dominance of English in U.S. schools, countless families still yearn to raise their children bilingually and biculturally for reasons that include communicating with non-English-speaking family members or advantages in academic, professional, and economic spheres (Caldas, 2006; Menard-Warwick, 2007). Furthermore, multicultural/multiethnic bilingual children have been reared successfully in many contexts both inside and outside of the United States. Kenner and Gregory (2003) noted: "More children in the world are bilingual than monolingual and more children are being educated bilingually or in a second language than only in their mother tongue" (p. 178). The development of multicultural identities needs fostering, as Samuels (2006) stated, "People who are multiracial are not automatically multicultural" (p. 39). Instead, fostering of multiple languages and additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975) occurs when the native language continues to be developed and maintained alongside the second language. The support and attitudes of parents then become particularly important in transmitting Spanish to a new generation (Pérez-Lerouz, Cuza, & Thomas, 2011).

Successful intergenerational language transmission depends on how parents plan ahead and modify language patterns to suit family needs (De Houwer, 2007). Indeed, bilingual families manage, learn, and negotiate language in unique ways within their families (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008). Some families who have successfully reared bilingual children have built associations between each language and domains that may be place specific, context specific, or person specific or a combination of these (Wong Fillmore, 1989). Families may adopt a pattern of language use where the place (e.g., home, church, school, shopping mall) or the context (e.g., neighborhood, interactions with grandparents, school class) determines which language will be used. Díaz (2011) documented the important role of the family, cultural community events, Latino popular culture, and community language schools that help legitimize Spanish. Portes and Hao (1998) found that strong proficiency in both

languages, which is uncommon, is more likely among those from high-status families and those who are able to attend high-status schools. One reason for this tendency is that Spanish is less likely to be stigmatized and racialized to the same degree among families of higher social status as compared to families from working-class neighborhoods, where schools often treat heritage languages as deficits that must be remediated (Valenzuela, 1999).

Still, the majority of children enrolled in bilingual programs in the United States tend to be from working-class immigrant families, and the goals of the majority of those programs are rapid transition into English. Regarding young adults, Blair and Cobas (2006) found a gender difference also exists regarding bilingualism in Latino families: "Latino females appear to be more readily influenced by their bilingual characteristics than their male counterparts" (pp. 302–303). Furthermore the influence of mothers speaking Spanish with their Latino daughters showed an increase in 4-year educational attainment for the young women (Blair & Cobas, 2006).

Although the majority of bilingual education programs serving students who speak languages other than English lead to subtractive bilingualism because transitioning to English is tantamount, in contrast, dual-language programs foster additive bilingualism. In dual-language programs, both native and second languages are developed and maintained through fifth grade and beyond in some cases (Cloud et al., 2000). Dual-language programs aim to serve both native English speakers and English-language learners in the same classroom, learning together in both languages. In dual-language programs, the home and school have the potential to become partners in promoting dynamic interplay between the heritage language and the dominant language, where the shift to English monolingualism can be countered (Caldas, 2006).

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

My eldest daughter Nelia (pseudonyms used for all participants) has attended three dual-language campuses in her academic career, and assessments by each district have identified her as a child unusually balanced in both languages. Before she entered the dual-language kindergarten in August 2005, for example, one district administered the Pre-Language

Assessment Scales (Pre-LAS) to Nelia that tested both her English and Spanish proficiency. Nelia scored in the 99th percentile in both languages, which prompted the dual-language director to state, "We had a lot of fun testing Nelia. We haven't seen a child this bilingual in a long time." Harriett also observed a high level of bilingual competence via bilingual reading and writing samples and home visits. Therefore, our research question was: How does a multiethnic and multiracial family ensure that a high level of bilingual competence is maintained? As a result of a 2-year ethnographic study, we isolated key actions and processes employed by family members and teachers to engage and encourage a multiethnic identity through the use of Spanish both inside and outside of the home.

My Family as Participants

My husband, Roberto, an Afro-Colombian immigrant, is one of the first in his family to receive a university degree. Roberto emigrated with his younger siblings from Cali, Colombia, to Miami, Florida, at the age of 14. I, on the other hand, am a U.S.-born, White native-English speaker from a middle-class background. My father was an Air Force pilot who was stationed in different countries and throughout the United States, which exposed me to many cultural and linguistic experiences. I learned Spanish as an adult while living and studying in Latin American countries, such as Mexico, Guatemala, and Ecuador, prior to becoming a bilingual education teacher in the United States. These experiences have made me more aware of the benefits of multilingualism and enabled me to analyze the complexities of language learning and the maintenance of skills in more than one language.

As a family with multiple identity markers living in the United States, my husband and I have tried to actively ensure that his Afro-Colombian culture and Spanish language were present, promoted, and maintained in the home. Our daughters, Nelia and Lisa, both have a caramel-colored complexion, brown curly hair, and dark-brown eyes. Nelia was the primary focus of this article, because by the end of the autoethnographic study she had completed three years in a U.S. public school where she was enrolled in dual-language (Spanish and English) programs.

The Community

We currently live in a big city in South Texas with a majority Latino population, mostly of Mexican origin. Nelia attends Bienvenidos Elementary School (pseudonym), where the student population is 88% Hispanic (the majority is Mexican origin), 7% non-Hispanic White, and 4% African American. Bienvenidos is attended by students mostly from working-class families; more than 95% of the student population is eligible to receive free and reduced-price lunch. The major reason that my family moved to this neighborhood was for the Bienvenidos Spanish and English dual-language program. Both monolingual English-speaking and monolingual Spanish-speaking kindergartners begin their formal schooling with majority Spanish-language instruction and then gradually increase English-language instruction until instruction is delivered equally at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This autoethnographic action research study sheds light on aspects of a multiethnic and multiracial family's experiences striving to promote Spanish and English bilingualism. The research has been a collaboration of insights from two researchers who drew on a combination of research methodologies, including autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and action research (Johnson, 2008; Stringer, 2007). Given the difficulties of capturing everyday family actions and processes that are used to maintain heritage language within the home, these methodologies were most appropriate as discussed below.

Autoethnography, the first methodology, has been cited as especially appropriate to connect "the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). An advantage of incorporating autoethnography is that we were able to incorporate greater self-reflexivity in reporting findings, which is consistent with the approach of the Chicago School researchers giving greater attention to context and allowing for greater accessibility of data (Hays & Singh, 2012). Autoethnographers draw on and document their own experiences, thoughts, feelings, and responses to sociocultural phenomenon as data and provide a first-person analytic account of relationships and events (Hays & Singh,

2012). In using this “historically, culturally, and personally situated” methodology (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1028), I engaged in this study having inseparable roles as both mother and researcher by documenting, analyzing, and reflecting on my family’s experiences. My first-person voice is used throughout the study. Being the mother of the focal participant, I recognize, along with my co-researcher, that I obviously felt a high level of pride toward Nelia’s and my family’s bilingualism. My co-researcher, who has done considerable fieldwork in the homes of Latino families focused on bilingual language acquisition and education, independently took fieldnotes after visits with the family and visits to the school settings to balance my subjectivity as subject and object.

For the second methodology, action research served to produce information and knowledge that can be useful to others who wish to raise bilingual or multicultural children, empowering those parents to consciously take up and use the information gathered in this research to help their children maintain family heritage languages and cultures. We understand that research on small samples and the particular context of this family cannot be generalized to all families; however, there are insights that can be applied to families who speak languages other than Spanish or who live in less ethnically diverse areas. An action research approach is collaborative in that it encourages people to examine particular issues affecting them or their community and to formulate accounts of their experiences that address those issues (Berg, 2009). This approach takes into account the study participants’ “history, culture, interactive activities and emotional lives” (Berg, 2009, p. 251) with an emphasis on what the researchers can gather with the assistance of the stakeholders to be shared and used by others. In this mutual collaborative study, an outsider (the sociologist) partnered with the parents trying to raise multicultural children to reflect on family and school interactions, identify language attitudes at the child’s school, and document the processes the family used to maintain bilingualism and multicultural identity in the home in an effort to find ways to enable families to confront the dilemma of loss of heritage language and culture.

Over a 2-year period, beginning when Nelia was 5 years old, the outsider (the sociologist and coauthor) and I (a parent trying to raise bilingual, multicultural children) collected and

analyzed data from a variety of sources that primarily explored Nelia’s language and literacy development, including school observations, extensive interviews, recordings of family interactions, family observations, and work samples. As a sociologist, Harriett conducted more than 6 hours of extensive joint interviews with my husband and me, covering a wide range of issues, from linguistic and cultural values to patterns of childrearing. Harriett also interviewed Nelia herself about how she felt about being bilingual, how she learned to speak English and Spanish, with whom she spoke each language, and her experiences with languages at school and with friends. Together, both researchers interviewed Nelia’s first-grade teacher, who discussed specific examples of Nelia’s bilingualism, her academic achievement, and her role as a bilingual language broker who mediated information and helped make educational decisions for her peers in the classroom (Tse, 1996). The teacher also explained the organization of the dual-language program. I interviewed extended family members, such as *Mamita* (Nelia’s Spanish-speaking grandmother), regarding language and culture in general and Nelia’s bilingualism in particular. In addition to interviews, I tape-recorded family interactions, group discussions, and everyday taken-for-granted interactions like dinner-table conversation, homework interactions, and events like shopping trips. We compiled specific examples and anecdotes demonstrating bilingualism, work samples of Nelia’s achievements, and test scores from her school.

Using a Grounded Theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we open-coded the interviews, at-home interactions, and fieldnotes separately. Then, we came together to discuss patterns that emerged and to identify salient themes. In coding the different domains, we began to see a more complete picture of the challenges encountered and the actions taken to maintain bilingualism and multiculturalism. We justified the selection of the dialogues presented here as “critical case sampling” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) to bring forward the discourse that best illustrates the strategies this family used to promote bilingualism and multiculturalism. Each of the primary domains of Nelia’s experience—family, extended family, and school—presented successful actions and obstacles in raising a bilingual, multicultural child. Four findings emerged as prominent contributors to promoting Nelia’s bilingual,

multicultural development and maintenance: (a) deliberate language planning in the early years, (b) exposure to varied language and cultural models, (c) formal bilingual and biliteracy instruction, and (d) fostering emotional ties to Spanish. There are many advantages for Nelia in living in a middle-class, multiethnic family and having a mother who is a bilingual educator, but the key processes that emerged for maintaining bilingualism can be implemented by multiethnic families of different socioeconomic statuses or different heritage languages as well. As Klee (2011) emphasized, parental choices and attitudes—particularly if they value bilingualism and take deliberate steps to counter the rapid language shift toward English—can make a significant difference in creating conditions that support heritage-language maintenance.

THE ROLE OF THE PARENT RESEARCHER

I have served as both a participant (i.e., Nelia's mother) and researcher; I am a teacher and an educational researcher interested in biliteracy and multicultural education. Harriett is a sociologist who learned Spanish as an adult, teaching in Central America and working with Mexican immigrant families. She is married to a Mexican American and has two adult children who are bilingual. We initially met and learned of our mutual research interests because Harriett recruited my youngest daughter, Lisa, for a study on bilingual infants. Although Lisa had brought us together, we selected Nelia for our collaborative exploration because of our interest in how the school and family contexts influenced Nelia's development and attitudes toward her heritage language of Spanish. Data collection took place from the time Nelia was a 5-year-old kindergartner through second grade. We acknowledge that the child's characteristics, such as her young age and early grades of school, affect her cognitive and language development and that her language use preferences and cultural identities may change as she matures. The autobiographical and inherently subjective nature of this exploration was mitigated, in part, because Harriett, a sociologist and an outsider to the family, brought objectivity and experiences with other bilingual families as a point of reference. As an insider, I was able to have countless opportunities to observe Nelia in intimate situations, realize nuances present

in family communication, and connect the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Additional data sources included observations in Nelia's classroom, teacher interviews, school documentation, and interviews with extended family members.

THE FAMILY'S STRATEGIES FOR ADDITIVE BILINGUALISM

Most bilingual families have many pressing demands that draw attention away from recognizing the need to deliberately emphasize their heritage languages and cultures with their children, often resulting in shifts to English (Hurtado & Vega, 2004; Wong Fillmore, 1991). A major challenge for Spanish-speaking families, especially from working-class backgrounds, is linguistic marginalization compounded by less social capital, fewer educational choices, and minimal financial resources. A common misassumption is that children will learn the heritage language present in the home, but parents often underestimate their children's extensive exposure to English (Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stults, 2002; Klee, 2011).

Deliberate Language Planning in the Early Years

From observing other families whose children had lost their bilingualism, Roberto and I realized that we would have to be deliberate about language and cultural learning. Roberto stated that many immigrants to the United States do not think about deliberately reinforcing their children in the use of their home language and culture because they themselves were not deliberately taught culture and language but acquired them from their home community. When Harriett first interviewed us, Roberto explained:

The culture is from what [Colombians] do. It is nothing we sit down and talk about. We go to parties; we listen to music. When we were in my home community, we did not have to think about it, not like we have to do with our daughters now. I was part of the culture already; it is not like it is going to be with our children. They will have to be taught.

Heritage-language speakers in U.S. schools who are not immersed in their heritage cultures as Roberto was growing up "will have to be taught" more explicitly. The public schooling

system has the potential to play a key role in valuing and fostering students' heritage languages and cultures in everyday policies and practices within the schools. Dual-language programs serve as a powerful model for additive bilingualism.

My side of the family does not speak Spanish; contact with English speakers in the larger family context would be strong forces toward an English-only language shift unless we deliberately fashioned bilingualism in our immediate family. In one of the interviews, the following discussion occurred between Roberto and me:

Kim: When we were talking about having kids, I said, "Our kids are going to be bilingual." And he said, "No, I don't think so." Because all his friends who have kids—they start switching to English or they never follow through with it at home. The peer pressure for English is too\break great.

Roberto: My greatest fear was when [Nelia's] maternal grandparents would take her for more than a week. "She's going to forget. She's going to forget her Spanish." Because most people say with their kids, "You try and try, and your kids don't work out to be bilingual." I've seen it. [Raising bilingual children] is hard and. . . . I think it is [Kim's] perseverance that made it happen, because I did not think it was going to happen.

Kim: So it was just very deliberate explanation from the time [Nelia] was young. And she has been able to distinguish her language use from very young as well. . . . She was just very aware of who used what language, and when, and in what context. She's our little linguist. . . . We're just hoping that Lisa [Nelia's sister] follows in her big sister's footsteps.

The fact that Roberto credits me with having the "perseverance" to make bilingualism happen

with our children brings to light our differing subject positions; the "mainstream" typically does not view my *elective* bilingualism (as a native-English speaker) through the same anti-immigrant, racialized lenses as Roberto's bilingualism. Many in the United States view immigrants' efforts to maintain a home language as a rejection of incorporation (Hurtado & Vega, 2004). Importantly, it is Roberto's native fluency in Spanish and his racial identity that bring authenticity to the bilingual, multicultural environment that we have taken special efforts to create in our home in order to counter the strong pull of English in other contexts. In that same interview, I explained:

When I say we are very deliberate with language use, being a bilingual teacher, I have a lot of Spanish books so we mostly read to Nelia in Spanish. Sometimes we'll indulge her with an English book but most of the time it is in Spanish. I only have *canciones* [songs] and *cuentos* [stories] in Spanish . . . in my car CD player. . . . We'd only buy DVDs with Spanish language tracks. . . . As soon as she went to an English-speaking day care, Roberto was like, "Ok, we can give up now, she's not going to continue with her bilingualism." And I was like "Oh, *yes she will!*"

As an example of how we carried out our family language planning on an on-going basis, the following dialogue took place after a back-to-school shopping trip where Nelia and I had bought some colorful socks that were made in Colombia—her father's country of origin. Nelia (N) was excited to show them to Roberto (R), making him guess where they were made. I, Kim (K), played along as Lisa (L)—my 2-year-old—watched the exchanges and interjected at one point claiming the socks as her own:

N: *¿De dónde son las medias?*

K: *Pero no le digas! ¿Dónde se echaron—dónde se hicieron?*

R: *¿China?*

N: *No, siempre es de China.*

K: *Las otras [medias] son de—*

N: *Korea [using English pronunciation]*

R: *Korea [using Spanish pronunciation]*

N: *¿Y de dónde son estas?*

R: *Bolivia.*

N: *No.* [whispers to K] Can I show him the package?

N: Where are the socks from?

K: But don't tell him! Where were they thrown—where were they made?

R: China?

N: No, it's always from China.

K: The others [socks] are from—

N: Korea [using English pronunciation]

R: Korea [correcting with Spanish pronunciation]

N: And where are these from?

R: Bolivia.

N: *No.* [whispers to K] Can I show him the package?

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- K: *Sí, si quieres.*
 N: [takes out the socks and covers up the words where they were made.]
 L: *Aah! My medias. Mías.*
 R: *Son de Michigan.*
 K: [laughs]
 N: [to K] *¿Le puedo dar una clave?*
 K: *Sí.*
 N: [whispers] I have one that he could guess, but I don't know—
 K: *Pues, pregúntale a papi si quiere una pista.*
 N: *¿Quieres una pista? ¿Buena? ¿Buena?*
 R: *Sí.*
 N: *Son de donde naciste.*
 R: *¡Medellín!*
 K: *Tú no naciste en Medellín. Pues, es del país, no de la ciudad.*
 R: *Oh, Colombia.*
 N: [starts to laugh] *Mira.*
 R: *De verdad. Sí, son de colores. Pues, por lo menos hicimos algo bueno.*
 N: *Y nunca son de Colombia.*
- K: Yes, if you wish.
 N: [takes out the socks and covers up the words where they were made]
 L: Aah! My socks. Mine.
 R: They are from Michigan.
 K: [laughs]
 N: [to K] Can I give him a clue?
 K: Yes.
 N: [whispers] I have one that he could guess but I don't know—
 K: Well, ask your dad if he wants a hint.
 N: Do you want a hint? A good one? Good?
 R: Yes.
 N: They are from where you were born.
 R: Medellín!
 K: You weren't born in Medellín. Well, it's the country, not the city.
 R: Oh, Colombia.
 N: [starts to laugh] Look.
 R: It's true. Yes, they are the colors. Well, at least we made something good.
 N: And they are never from Colombia.
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Because Roberto has misled Nelia to believe that he speaks only Spanish fluently, Nelia never addresses him in English. Therefore, the interaction was primarily in Spanish, except when Nelia switched to English when she whispered to me. Nelia is aware that my English proficiency is stronger than my Spanish proficiency, as evidenced when I corrected my awkward word choice: “se echaron.” Although not always consistent, I responded to Nelia’s whispered English question in Spanish and Nelia continued the interaction in Spanish.

Roberto modeled the Spanish pronunciation of Korea after Nelia pronounced it with an English accent. In this brief interaction, my 2-year-old daughter, Lisa, demonstrated her emerging bilingualism with a mixture of English and Spanish when she claimed, “My medias” (using the English possessive pronoun “my” and the Spanish noun “medias” for socks). Nelia used the Spanish word “clave” for clue, and I supplied additional Spanish vocabulary “pista” for the same idea of keeping someone on track or giving them a clue. Nelia picked up on the newly modeled word and repeated “pista” herself. Although English is sometimes used in the home between Nelia and me, this interaction demonstrates how Roberto and I strive to

promote Spanish as the common home language by incorporating strategies such as modeling correct pronunciation, extending vocabulary, and requiring Spanish. Our efforts to maintain the dialogue in Spanish and pride in Roberto’s country of origin were evident throughout the exchange.

Exposure to Varied Language and Cultural Models

The importance of exposing Nelia to Spanish speakers from different cultural groups, physical appearances, and socioeconomic statuses also emerged from the interviews, observations, and reflections as a major theme. Roberto and I made a deliberate effort to demonstrate to Nelia that people from all different income levels, racial groups, and professions speak Spanish, as I touched on in the following excerpt:

And I think a lot of times, since we are middle class, that has helped her take more pride in Spanish. I know from being a bilingual teacher and from the research, when kids reject their home language, . . . they often see it as lower status, as having less privilege. We live as a middle class, formally educated family. The issue of status and privilege is never in question or, when it is in question, we can create a lot of counterexamples: Formally

educated people do speak Spanish, people all hues and colors speak Spanish as well.

Roberto and I emphasize the diversity of Spanish speakers and continue to reinforce the importance of learning about Roberto's home country, culture, and language as a family strategy emphasizing multiethnicity. Roberto and his mother, whom we call *Mamita*, began a small restaurant featuring her renowned Colombian *platos* (dishes). The restaurant draws many Latino and Latina clients from the Caribbean and Central and South America as well as native Texans who speak Spanish. As found in Samuels' (2010) article about relational processes of bicultural identity, having opportunities for children to engage in cultural immersion is central for developing one's identity. As I noted in one interview:

Nelia got to see people from all walks of life, of all classes, all colors come in speaking Spanish. The fact that we have the restaurant has been fabulous for getting [Nelia] to know the food, the culture, and the language. Not only does she eat her grandmother's cooking everyday from the time she was a year and a half, she sees her grandmother do what she does best—cooking—and having so much pride in the kitchen. It's just been immeasurable the impact that has had.

This restaurant context reinforced the Colombian culture through food and atmosphere and provided many Spanish-speaking models for Nelia “from all walks of life.” These funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) provided by extended family—so often overlooked in school curriculum—can prove to be rich sources of student expertise that can be incorporated into school classrooms.

Spanish language media became other important sources of language models and exposure to formal Spanish. The city where we live has two large Spanish-language media stations, *Univision* and *Telemundo*. Roberto explained that “*Univision* is the channel we watch the most. And Nelia has started to try to understand *telenovelas* now.” Roberto and I also allow Nelia to watch cartoons in Spanish and select movies on DVD with Spanish-language audiotracks. The Internet provides another valuable resource for children's music, movies, games, and books in Spanish.

Roberto and I recognize the strong influence of English when our children are outside of the

home. Roberto even feared that Nelia would lose her Spanish as soon as she entered an English-speaking preschool. We continue to reinforce Spanish language and culture through children's books and by ensuring that Nelia sees us reading and writing in Spanish. Roberto and I read magazines and books in Spanish and talk in Spanish to relatives and friends in person and by telephone. This strategy helps Nelia navigate the transitions between home and school. Furthermore, as Samuels (2006) explained, “A common question among parents of multi-racial children is often, ‘Where should we live?’” (p. 57). When we had to move, we sought a home in neighborhoods within dual-language school boundaries to assure that Nelia could receive formal bilingual instruction from a young age and community support for bilingualism and multiethnic families.

Formal Bilingual and Biliteracy Instruction

Previous child bilingual acquisition research (Gutierrez-Clellen & Kreiter, 2003) has indicated that teacher estimates of language use and proficiency are useful to determine a child's bilingual status. We interviewed Nelia's first grade teacher, Mrs. Rodriguez (pseudonym), and visited the classroom. Mrs. Rodriguez explained that enrolling Nelia in the dual-language program was a deliberate undertaking, because she would not have qualified as “Limited English Proficient:”

[Nelia] scored high enough in both languages. It's an oral proficiency test. It is based on picture vocabulary and verbal analogies. . . . As you can see, some of these are difficult. Well, Nelia scored high in both languages, . . . which [means] that she is bilingual but she doesn't need bilingual services. . . . So her mom has to say that she wants her to be in the dual-language program and that's how she comes into the bilingual setting.

Despite the fact that this is a dual-language program, this teacher states that Nelia, “doesn't need bilingual services.” This fact is one example of how the prestige and dominance of English plays itself out in our schools: Because Nelia was considered a fluent English speaker, her heritage language of Spanish would have been disregarded altogether in most schools. Fortunately, the dual-language program in *Bienvenidos* sought additive bilingualism and biliteracy for its monolingual English-speaking,

monolingual Spanish-speaking, and bilingual student population.

Mrs. Rodriguez also reinforced Nelia's awareness of and proficiency in both languages:

I think [Nelia] has already learned which children speak Spanish and which children speak English most of the time and she can converse with either child and it just depends on what we are doing. . . . It just depends what we're speaking at the moment and she'll speak in that language but she's *very very bilingual*. . . . I've already talked to a couple of second grade teachers "Do you want an extra reading student?" . . . We need her as a very good model in both languages. She brings in new vocabulary.

Nelia's teacher positively reinforced Nelia's bilingualism in the classroom by emphasizing her role as a bilingual model and language broker for other children. She often called upon Nelia to help both the native English- and Spanish-speaking children in her class. Nelia's work in both languages was prominently displayed in the classroom. The teacher explained that Nelia tested at high levels on state assessments in both English and Spanish, was able to read fluently above grade level in both languages, and was able to express herself very well in science and social studies class discussions in Spanish and English. The teacher also recognized the parents' deliberate role in utilizing strategies to foster bilingualism and vocabulary development in Spanish.

The teacher confirmed the value of bilingualism as a positive cognitive ability. She discussed the advantages that bilingual children bring to the classroom:

My theory is the children come to me, some speak Spanish, some speak English, some are like Nelia, they are bilingual students—although Nelia . . . she goes from one language to another at a time. . . . They become critical thinkers and they become very good problem solvers. They also learn how to relate. . . . They learn how to help each other and then we are learning a lot about cultures, not only the uniqueness of their culture and what that means to them but the uniqueness of other children's culture and how we are becoming a blend. . . . No one here speaks one language anymore; we are all bilingual.

Mrs. Rodriguez went on to describe the pressures on students to transition into English at the higher grade levels and the community contexts that reinforced Spanish:

As they go into third grade there is a big shift, there is a lot of peer pressure for English all of a sudden. It just depends on what era it is. When we were in the Selena [top Mexican American singer-songwriter of the 1990s] era, then everybody wanted to speak Spanish; even the English speakers wanted to speak Spanish. So there is a lot of influence from the media too. . . . These last few years, there has been more English. The kids want to use more English; even the Spanish speakers now, they are all speaking English. Third grade is a critical year. When I was teaching third grade, it was a strict rule when we were in Spanish you had to speak *español*. You have to sort of put rules like that so that they will practice their Spanish because they will want to talk in English and stay in English.

The teacher attempted to reinforce different contexts or situations in which Spanish was dominant in order to counter the pressures of English. She emphasized the role of the Spanish popular culture and Spanish language media in supporting the acquisition of Spanish. The opportunity for Roberto and me to choose a positive teacher and a strong dual-language program has been key for Nelia's formal and academic bilingual and biliteracy development. These examples of the way Nelia's school and home mutually reinforced rich heritage language and multicultural environments demonstrate the power of school to validate and promote students' linguistic resources in dual-language programs.

Fostering Emotional Ties to Spanish

Given the prevalence and inherently high status of English in the United States, fostering Nelia's emotional ties to English had never been as much of a concern as ensuring that Nelia developed an affection for Spanish. Therefore, the final theme that emerged regarding our actions to promote and maintain Spanish and English bilingualism was focused on fostering emotional ties to Spanish.

Roberto and I explicitly discussed his country of origin, Colombia, so Nelia could associate Spanish with her father's historical and genealogical background, thus emphasizing pride in a multiethnic and multiracial identity. In kindergarten, Nelia explained to Harriett how she learned Spanish as a direct result of her father's emigration from Colombia:

Harriett: . . . ¿Y cómo aprendiste español?

Nelia: *Mi papá nació en Colombia.*

Harriett: ¿Y por eso aprendiste español?

Nelia: *Sí.*

Harriett: And how did you learn Spanish?

Nelia: My dad was born in Colombia.

Harriett: And that's why you learned Spanish?

Nelia: Yes.

Because Roberto's immediate family currently lives in the United States and traveling to Colombia is quite costly, Nelia had never been to Colombia. We tried to convey to Nelia an understanding of Roberto's country of origin and what it was like to grow up there.

Mamita, Nelia's monolingual Spanish-speaking grandmother, had only attended school through the second grade in rural Colombia and therefore never felt especially confident in her literacy abilities in Spanish, which caused her much frustration and angst when she had tried to learn English both formally and informally. Although she had been in the United States for more than 15 years, she used only Spanish in her everyday life. When I interviewed *Mamita*, she continually mentioned the fact that "*A Nelia le gusta el español.* [Nelia likes Spanish]." In addition to emphasizing the importance of children

liking Spanish, *Mamita* also named some of the actions previously mentioned, such as speaking only Spanish in the home and placing Nelia in a bilingual education program as ways the family had maintained Nelia's bilingualism:

Roberto elaborated on the emotional connections to Spanish: "The fact that [Nelia] is bilingual, my mother is really excited, because of the four grandchildren, she is the only one that is bilingual and the only one that [my mother] can talk to—really talk to." *Mamita* echoed these observations and stated that she can communicate only with signs with her monolingual English-speaking grandchildren, using "*señas nomás.*" *Mamita's* other grandchildren are enrolled in all-English instruction at their schools, although Spanish is their heritage language on both maternal and paternal sides of the family. The bilingual curriculum and context

Kim: ¿Y cómo llegó a ser bilingüe Nelia?

Mamita: Ustedes le enseñaron desde el principio. . . . Se preocuparon para que aprendiera el español. . . . En la casa aseguraron que se hablara únicamente español. . . . También está en una escuela bilingüe.

Kim: ¿Usted cree que Nelia lo va a mantener?

Mamita: Sí, porque aprendió desde pequeña. Y si sigue hablando, no se le olvida.

Kim: ¿Y espera que Lisa sea bilingüe?

Mamita: Ojalá que sí. Si le gusta, sí. Pero si no le gusta, no.

Kim: ¿A Nelia le gusta?

Mamita: Creo que le gusta porque si no, nadie le podría convencer.

Kim: ¿Y qué pasa si no le gusta?

Mamita: Hay niños que rechazan el español aunque se habla español en la casa. Pero si no les gusta, no lo van a hablar. Los padres les hablan en español y [los niños] les contestan en inglés.

Kim: And how did Nelia become bilingual?

Mamita: You both taught her from the beginning. . . . You concerned yourselves that she learn Spanish. . . . At home, you made sure that you would only speak Spanish. . . . Also, she is in a bilingual school.

Kim: Do you think that Nelia is going to maintain Spanish?

Mamita: Yes, because she learned it since she was small. And if she continues speaking it, she won't forget it.

Kim: Do you think Lisa will be bilingual?

Mamita: I hope so. If she likes it, yes. But if she doesn't like it, no.

Kim: Do you think Nelia likes Spanish?

Mamita: I think that she likes it because, if not, no one could convince her to like it.

Kim: And what happens if a child doesn't like it?

Mamita: There are children who reject Spanish even though they speak Spanish at home. Because if they don't like it, they aren't going to speak it. The parents speak Spanish to them and the children answer in English.

in Nelia's school have supported her bilingualism and multiculturalism and, in turn, allowed her a closer relationship with extended family members.

Harriett asked Nelia about the importance of being bilingual. She seemed to prioritize the social benefits more than any other aspect:

Harriett: *¿Piensas que un idioma es más importante que el otro?*

Nelia: *Creo que los dos son importantes.*

Harriett: *¿Y por qué? ¿Por qué es importante ser bilingüe?*

Nelia: *Bueno, podemos ayudar a muchas personas. Y hablar a las personas.*

more in English now that she is bigger, sometimes we will converse in English but I only have to say, “¿Cómo? [What?]” and she automatically speaks in Spanish because it is easy for her. Sometimes she will scold me and say, “You understand, Mom.” And I say, “Yes, but you have to speak in Spanish and you have to be the most important

Harriett: Do you think that one language is more important than the other?

Nelia: I think that they are both important.

Harriett: And why? Why is it important to be bilingual?

Nelia: Well, we can help a lot of people. And talk to the people.

Nelia described how she helped her classmates: “*Los que no saben mucho español les ayudo. . . . Les ayudo a trabajar y a escribir. [I help those who don't know much Spanish. . . . I help them with their work and their writing.]*” As a translator and language broker who facilitates communication between her linguistically and culturally different peers, Nelia gains social status for her bilingualism.

Besides promoting emotional ties to Spanish through learning about Roberto's country of origin and connecting to monolingual Spanish-speaking family members, we provided opportunities for social interactions where Spanish was the language of preference. Roberto and I make the most of Nelia's affections for her little sister by emphasizing her role as teacher and role model for Lisa's bilingual and biliterate development. During a family dinner, for instance, Nelia said something to Lisa in English. I reminded Nelia, “*Háblale en español [Speak to her in Spanish.]*” Without batting an eye, Nelia quickly interpreted what she had just said in Spanish. I then asked, “*¿Por qué es importante hablarle a Lisa en español [Why is it important to speak Spanish to Lisa?]*?” Nelia replied with a matter-of-fact tone, “*Porque me va a copiar. [Because she is going to copy me.]*” By promoting Nelia's bilingualism in this way, Lisa's bilingualism is supported.

When Nelia was younger, we had a rule: “*Español en la casa. [Spanish at home.]*” In our first interview with Harriett, I explained in Spanish:

Now we don't have to be so strict because it is a routine. The rule was more explicit when Nelia was little but now it is not as explicit. She talks

teacher for Lisa.” We told [Nelia] that she had to speak Spanish, because when the baby was born, she was talking to her in English and we told her she was going to be the most important model.

As a bilingual teacher and researcher, I know from experience that older siblings are often more bilingual than their younger siblings. Therefore, Roberto and I have placed a major responsibility on Nelia. Emphasizing Nelia's role as a Spanish model for her younger sister has enhanced the prestige of Spanish and has raised awareness and consciousness of the importance of the language and culture.

In general, maintaining Spanish requires constant vigilance because of the prevalence of English and its high status in U.S. society. I often point out the emotional connections to Nelia in relation to the people she loves who speak Spanish to emphasize the importance of maintaining the language. I explained:

I remember when Nelia was probably two and a half she started to request all her bedtime stories in English and that really was traumatic for me. So I went overboard and went into who's bilingual in her life, who's English-speaking in her life, who's Spanish-speaking in her life, and why the people she loves are not all bilingual so she has to be bilingual. Gi-Gi (my mother) speaks English and you have to speak English. And *Mamita* (Roberto's mother) speaks Spanish so you have to speak Spanish. And then we talked about who is bilingual and how she is going to be bilingual.

Offering important, but also heartwarming, reasons to speak Spanish and providing respected role models in Spanish became important strategies to confront the sometimes negative images in the larger society against languages other than English, such as efforts to

promote English only or derogatory comments of strangers who did not understand Spanish. Roberto heard a radio report about a school district suspending a child for speaking Spanish in school, which confirmed our need to emphasize the positive aspects of bilingualism:

We are just hoping we have the ability to understand. I guess some people feel threatened. In Europe there are countries where many people speak several languages. I think it is completely wrong to forbid students to speak Spanish. The students are trying to keep their culture alive. I guess it is the school board or the teachers who fear that it is taking over. I don't feel that way. I feel it is a plus and in other areas of the country it is a plus.

Roberto and I foster Nelía's emotional ties to Spanish by emphasizing the positive relations with *Mamita* and other Spanish-dominant relatives. We help her know that Spanish will facilitate knowledge and understanding of her father's heritage culture as part of her own multiethnic identity. We stress the importance of Spanish for maintaining connections with her peers and younger sister and her responsibility as a teacher and role model in family, school, and community contexts.

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is often erroneously assumed that bilingualism happens automatically at home, that the private habits and patterns of the household will hold sway against a dominant language and culture. We cannot, however, underestimate formal schooling's influence on heritage language use and the rapid loss of children's bilingual proficiency. In exploring and documenting actions that were crucial in fostering Nelía's additive bilingualism and multiculturalism, this case study illuminates the importance of the family and school's ideology toward additive bilingualism and access to dual-language programs. As iterated in previous research (Caldas, 2006; Zentella, 2005), children like Nelía who continue to use the heritage language in both social and academic situations can be expected to develop proficiency in that language, especially if they have favorable perceptions of the importance of maintaining it. Nelía's case could also be attributed to her gender, as emphasized in the Blair and Cobas's (2006) study where they found a greater propensity within Latino females to

embrace bilingual characteristics such as acting as translator in a family. Thus, this case study supports the need for more dual-language programs that build on the linguistic and multiethnic resources children bring from home to promote bilingualism.

The dialogue excerpt regarding the socks made in Colombia demonstrates how pride in the country of origin and heritage language maintenance can become an integral part of how families reinforce language and ethnic identity in the homes. Teachers could ask families and children to share such examples in the classroom to bridge families' funds of knowledge about bilingualism and countries of origin within classroom instruction.

Nelía's experiences in the school also emphasize the important role of teachers in recognizing children's bilingual, multicultural strengths in the classroom and valuing bilingualism. By encouraging Nelía to act as a language broker and recognizing her contributions to class activities in Spanish, the teacher gave Nelía more confidence and pride in her bilingualism and sent a strong message to all children in the class regarding the value of bilingualism.

In spite of the privileges of my family's educational background, social and cultural capital, and socioeconomic status, we (as parents wanting to raise bilingual, multiethnic children) had to consciously reinforce the value of bilingualism and take actions to support it in the face of challenges and resistance from the larger U.S. society. Our analysis demonstrated that it was necessary to deliberately and consistently reinforce the home language and culture even within a bilingual household. This idea of "teaching" one's culture at home was discussed by Samuels (2010) in her study of multiracial adoptees in White families, where she found that establishing "racial kinship" ties, such as the strategies we employed in our household, provided an important connection to one's heritage and culture.

All families can point out the emotional connections to persons in the child's immediate and extended family, friends, and other role models who are bilingual who legitimize the heritage language. All families can identify persons from different socioeconomic backgrounds who take pride in their bilingualism. All families can continue to reinforce the heritage language in the home and still value learning English. All families, particularly recent immigrants, can

tap into the wealth of fluent heritage language speakers available to reinforce heritage language and culture maintenance. Strategies for maintaining bilingualism and multiculturalism can include respecting family and ethnic celebrations and encouraging family time and routines (Díaz, 2011) as well as promoting language flexibility and emphasizing positive feelings toward bilingualism and multicultural family life.

In looking to the future, we recognize the hegemony of English in the United States. As Nelia and her younger sister mature, they will face many challenges. There are few dual-language programs at the secondary level to support literacy and academic development in Spanish. In adolescence they will be exposed to sustained contact with English in the schools, in media, and in peer groups. Their ethnic and cultural identities and language attitudes and language use will continue to evolve in these new contexts. As explained by Klee (2011), “Latino youth, in particular, face complex issues as they construct an ethnolinguistic identity within an English-speaking society” (p. 364). At the very least, however, we aspire for Nelia to be able to effectively communicate with other Spanish speakers across her life span. At the very best, we hope that Nelia will continue to develop her academic register in Spanish that was given as a foundation in the home and dual-language program. We hope that she will continue to identify with her Afro-Colombian cultural background and her Spanish heritage language, although we recognize that intergenerational transmission of Spanish is quite difficult beyond the second generation.

In the end, it is important to recognize that my family has an asset of social capital in the form of postsecondary education in the United States, and my training as a bilingual teacher assists in enabling us to navigate the school system and work closely with teachers. We also have economic resources that enable us to replicate school resources in the form of bilingual books and videos in the home. We recognize that additive bilingualism is often a difficult undertaking, particularly for working-class families. Parental choices and attitudes, however, can make a significant difference in creating the conditions for support of Spanish language maintenance. Additive bilingualism requires a collective school-home effort to elevate not only the value of bilingualism

but also the cultural value of Spanish as a language. These collective efforts are crucial for working-class children with a multiplicity of identity markers who are more vulnerable to discrimination and deficit-oriented attitudes toward their native or heritage language because of their immigration status, race, educational background, and socioeconomic status. Access to high-quality dual-language programs for native and heritage speakers of minority languages can encourage children and their families to embrace and utilize the cultural and linguistic resources that students bring with them from home, resources that all too often are overlooked or seen through deficit-oriented lenses.

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