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LOVING IN TWO LANGUAGES: LANGUAGE CHOICE AND EMOTIONALITY IN FAMILY COMMUNICATION OF KAZAKH BILINGUALS

We are a bilingual family.
We speak in two languages.
We live in two languages.

/Azhar, 22, Kazakh student/

Abstract: Highlighting the intrinsic difficulty in trying to measure a concept as elusive as emotion, the article brings together the latest wave of research in the field of both sociological and cultural studies on bilinguals' emotional responses. Irrefutably, one arena in which emotional concomitants of language are keenly experienced is in bilinguals' sense that there is no greater emotional significance than the ones related to the speakers' first and second languages.

The above raises interesting possibilities for explorations in the area of the concept of bilingualism; specifically: What are the emotion-related factors in language choice of bilingual family members? Do all bilinguals prefer their first language to express affect? Should the first language be perceived as the language of emotions and the second as the language of detachment? What are bilinguals' linguistic preferences while articulating emotionality in a family context?

The initial step of this article is to expound the sociolinguistically-conditioned phenomenon of language dominance and expressions of emotionality within Kazakh family units. In what follows, not only is a review of the existing studies on language dominance offered, but the present article also discusses the author's own investigation drawing on 54 Kazakh students and their parents' responses to a questionnaire on bilingualism and emotions.

From the wealth of data provided, two core themes are to be identified: distinctive factors affecting Kazakh-Russian bilinguals' language choice as well as the emotionality characteristics of first and the second languages in family-context communication. Returning to reflection on emotion, vivid quotes from the respondents add a vibrant human dimension to this account by illustrating the inevitable continuum between sociolinguistic and cultural aspects.

Key words: emotions, perceived emotionality, language dominance, bilingual families.

Perspectives on bilingualism and language choice

Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses of bilinguals' linguistic choices have been at the centre of investigation in many dimensions of language experience, such as linguistic proficiency, processing of information, ease of speech, or cultural identification. Given that, different emphases and approaches, coupled with the numerous disciplines examining them, have demonstrated that the construct of dominance in the bilingual context is properly acknowledged in relativistic, not absolute, terms.

Given the significance of dominance in a number of domains, it may also affect code-switching patterns (DiSciullo, Muysken, Singh 1986; Muysken 1991; Basnight-Brown, Altarriba 2007), predict cross-linguistic transfer in syntactic processing (Rah 2010; Isurin 2005), shape the language of mental arithmetic operations (Tamasaki 1993), control lexical memory representations of a bilingual speaker (Paivio 1990; Heredia 1997) as well as govern the perceptions of the usefulness and richness of a bilingual's two linguistic systems (Dewaele 2004). Adding yet another layer of complexity, language dominance also plays a notable role in clinical research, being a key issue in language therapy treatment (Gollan, Salmon, Paxton 2006; Lim, Liow, Lincoln, Chan, Onslow 2008; Howell, Ruffle, Fernandez-Zuniga, Gutierrez, Fernandez, O'Brien 2004).

Unquestionably, the importance of dominance in these numerous arenas contributed to the understanding of bilingual speech as essentially a societal phenomenon (Auer 1998; Franceschini 1998; Hlavac 1999; Muysken 2000; Poplack 2001; Romaine 1989). Indeed, as Mackey cogently argues *bilingualism is not a phenomenon of language; but a characteristic of its use. It is not a feature of the code but of the message. It does not belong to the domain of 'language' but of 'parole'* (1962:51).

Research design

Objective. The purpose of the present analysis was to determine a wide spectrum of emotion-laden factors related to bilingual emotionality adopted by the contributors within family-context communication. Data on language dominance, interlocutors' linguistic proficiency as well as social contexts of use elicited from 54 Kazakh-Russian bilingual participants enabled the examination of parallel points along with dissimilarities between accounts of emotional states expressed in both languages.

Subjects. 54 Kazakh-Russian bilinguals aged between 17-55, including 35 female (65%) and 19 male respondents (35%), participated in the study. The sample included both students at the University of Information Technology and

Management in Rzeszów, Poland, and their parents. A survey of the number of languages spoken by each individual revealed that the sample consists of 36 bilinguals (67%), 8 trilinguals (15%) and one speaker of four languages (2%). Together, the multilinguals in the sample spoke 4 languages: Kazakh, Russian, English and Polish, and the quantitative analysis of responses identifies Kazakh as the first language (L1) and Russian as the second language (L2) of participants.

Method. The internal validity of the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q)[1] was established on the basis of self-reported data from contributors. Also, the *Bilingualism and emotions* questionnaire[2] containing 34 questions, allowed us to obtain sociobiographical data such as gender, age, level of education, linguistic preference, chronological order of language acquisition, context of acquisition, frequency/context of use, typical interlocutors, as well as self-rated proficiency assessment for speaking, comprehending, reading and writing in the languages in question. Linguistic preference was determined for self- and other-directed speech as well as for emotional and non-emotional context of use. Within those concepts, two primary research interests emerged and were established in the centre of analysis; namely, (1) which emotional aspects influence language preference within bilingual families? and (2) do perceptions of language emotionality change in the process of language socialisation?

Data analysis: Language preference determinants

The multitude of data elicited directly both quantitatively and qualitatively identify language dominance as the key factor affecting language preferences both overall and in emotion-laden discourse. In a one-way analysis language dominance was treated as an independent variable, thus the participants were divided into three subgroups: L1 dominant, L2 dominant and L1+L2 dominant. Linguistic dominance together with child-directed language usage in the L1 as the dependent variable irrefutably present a highly substantial influence on language preference. Given that, if speakers are dominant in the L1, they are most likely to adopt the L1 for communicating with family members. Nonetheless, if bilinguals prefer the L2, they are less likely to use the L1. This scheme is depicted in Table 1 summarizing the language choices of the Kazakh-Russian bilinguals studied. Drawing from the data collected, it is evident that in each subgroup the highest number of participants opted to use the language in which they were dominant.

Among the 54 informants, only one decided to adopt L2 while being dominant in L1, and there were no cases in which a speaker perceived himself/herself as dominant in L2 and used exclusively L1 with relatives.

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[1] Marian, Blumfield, Kaushanskaya (2007).
[2] Dewaele, Pavlenko (2001-2003).

Language dominance	Language used in family communication	Respondents in the sample
L1	L1	15 (27.7%)
	L1+L2	8 (14.8%)
	L2	1 (1.8%)
L2	L2	4 (7.4%)
	L1 + L2	2 (3.7%)
	L1	-
L1 + L2	L1+L2	12 (22.2%)
	L1	7 (12.9%)
	L2	5 (9.3%)

Table 1. Participants' language preference in communication with family members.

Likewise, as illustrated in Figure 1, there was a noteworthy and powerful L1 dominance impact linked directly both to praise and discipline, indicating that linguistic preference strongly affects also language choice for emotional discourses. Furthermore, being dominant either in both L1 and L2, or in L2, family members are somewhat more likely to adopt the L1 for disciplining their relatives whereas the L2 is used for praising them.
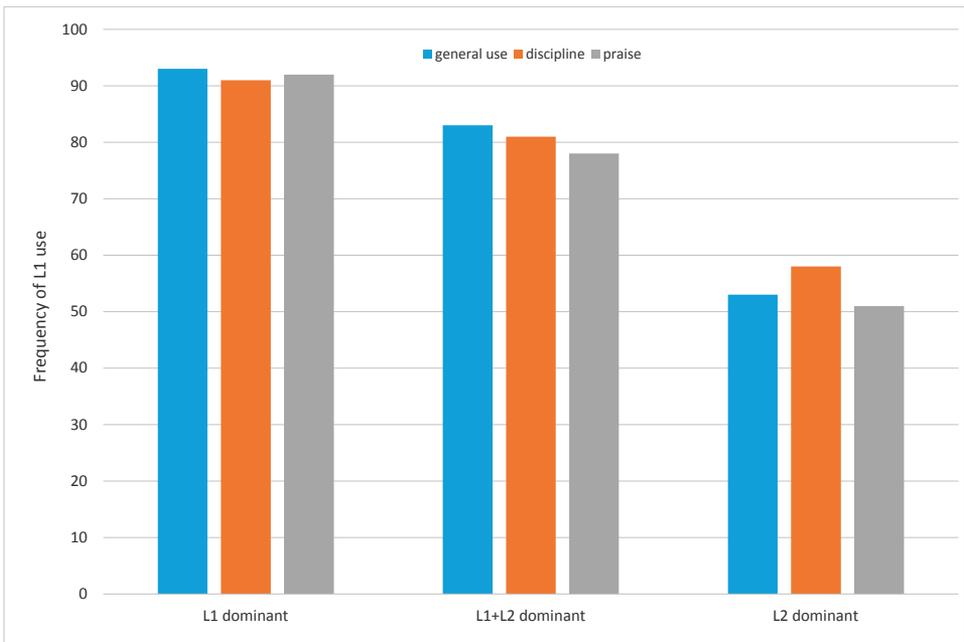

Figure 1. Influence of linguistic dominance on language choice in family communication.

Perhaps the most persistent enquiry regarding the bilingual family members is, how does perceived linguistic emotionality contribute to their language choices?

Drawing largely on the questionnaire results, the average value of perceived emotionality indicates that for the L1 the rate constitutes 70 per cent compared to 30 per cent for the L2. Consequently, when contrasted with the L2, the L1 is much more emotion-laden for the participants. The research conducted by Pavlenko (2004:187) also indicates that there exists no statistical relationship in L1 between language emotionality and language choice. In fact, the preference of L1 seems to be strongly influenced by dominance and hence there is no statistical connection in L1 between dominance and perceived emotionality as even L2-dominant bilinguals continue to perceive their L1 as highly emotional in communicating with relatives.

Yet another important insight emerging from the data presented in Figure 2 is that there is a marginal effect of the perceived emotionality of L2 on the general choice of that language. As a result, the family members are more likely to select this language if they recognise it as more emotion-laden.

These results also indicate the effect of perceived language emotionality on the choice of L2 for emotional speech acts such as praising and disciplining. Specifically, 73% of the respondents noted that L2 emotionality absolutely affects their language choice during disciplining acts and 67% when they use praising expressions. As for general language use, it appears to be less influenced by the perceived emotionality of L2.
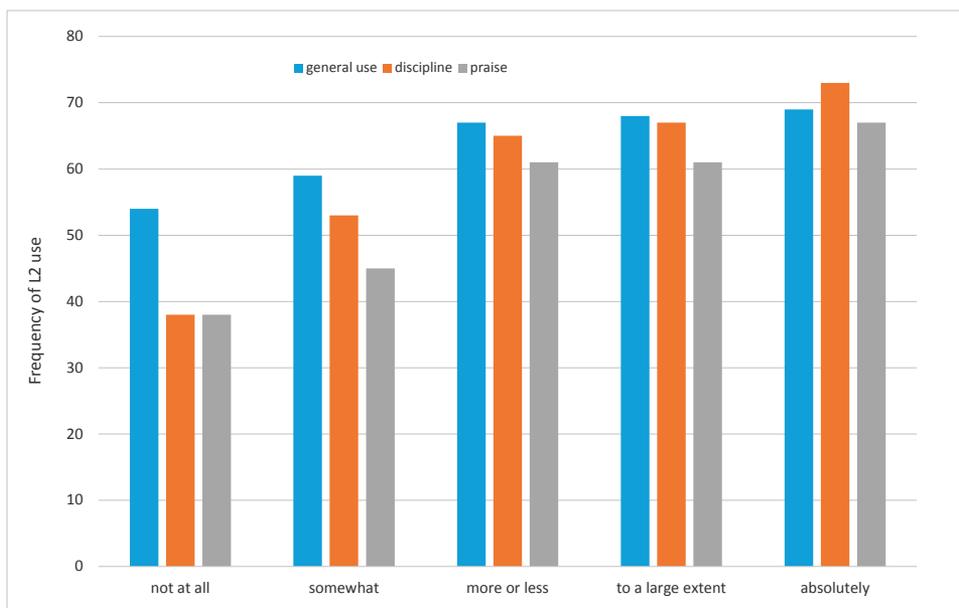

Figure 2. Influence of perceived emotionality on language choice in family-context communication.

Altogether, one may assume that perceived language emotionality plays rather a minor role in overall language choice for family-oriented communication, which

is mostly affected by language dominance. Put succinctly, despite the fact that relatives dominant in L2 may still perceive their L1 as highly emotive, they tend to favour L2 for communicating purposes. Nevertheless, by way of contrast, perceived language emotionality influences the overall choice of L2; particularly for emotional speech acts, such as praising and disciplining. As a result, when perceived as both more emotional and expressive, a language learnt later in life tends to be chosen by family members.

Given these binary tendencies, a cause-and-effect relationship cannot be revealed by the analysis results since the higher perceived emotionality may well in fact be a consequence of more frequent language usage. Accordingly, it is crucial to note that neither language dominance nor emotionality is independent phenomenon existing autonomously without societal contexts of use as well as human agency. Rather, in the words of Pavlenko (2004:188), *they are corollaries of complex linguistic trajectories of individuals who make choices about what language to use, when and with whom.* Indeed, in order to comprehend how these aforementioned choices are exercised, one needs to go beyond the statistical trends and turn to reflection on the emotions of the participants.

L1 and emotionality in family communication

It is possible that the statistics presented raise more questions than they provide answers, and in the process, open new avenues for further investigation into the subject. What is more, perceived language emotionality is referred to as a significant aspect for bilinguals either in overall language choices or in choices made for the particular connotations carried by emotion terms within a family context.

Accordingly, the scholars Pinker (1994:201) and Pavlenko (2004:189) have both written extensively on the general linguistic preferences. What the authors contend is that the perceived emotionality of L1 seems to enhance the conviction of bilinguals who reproduce the socialisation experiences of their own language. In fact, this L1 primeval emotionality has been pointed out by one of the participants advocating that:

Kazakh is my first language; it is the language that I always use to express my emotions when I talk to my daughter, Alemgul. I think that this language is a mother-child pattern. [...] Why do I reproduce it? I think because I want to transmit the same language as my mum used with me. It is the language which my mother used to express her love for me (Azhar, 43, L1 dominant).

Other bilinguals agree. A similar feeling is expressed by another participant who noted:

Well, to be honest, I prefer my first language – Kazakh. When I use Russian, it just doesn't sound right. For example, when my younger sister was born I promised myself to speak to her in Russian to help her;[3] but it didn't feel right somehow; I didn't know the words or they just couldn't express what I felt – the Russian words weren't good enough. It sounded fake (Batyrkhan, 19, L1 dominant).

Ardasher, L1 dominant 23-year-old Kazakh student, remembers how surprised he was when his sister decided to adopt Russian as the family language:

When my sister got married and gave birth to my niece, she started talking Russian at home. Despite the fact that I am fluent in Russian, I would never have spoken to my own children in any other language than Kazakh. I really felt awkward listening to Mufida [my sister] cooing to my niece in Russian. […] It seems artificial, not real somehow.

Based on the respondents' ratings of the emotional impact of L1, one may perceive it as a rational choice due to their superior linguistic competence in understanding the connotations of L1 emotional terms. Unquestionably, many of the arguments presented above apply to Pavlenko's assumption, who couches Azhar's desire to recreate her childhood experience in technical terms, such as *reproduction of a mother-child affective pattern* (2004:189).

By the same token, while Batyrkhan was explicit about the affective reasons shaping his language choice in interaction with sister, the vast majority of L1 dominant participants, since raising their children/siblings in the L1, perceived Kazakh emotionality as something natural and thus they rarely commented on it. Yet, the above issue emerges in the case of Kazakh-Russian bilinguals who attempt to adopt the L2 in communication with their relatives. According to the participants, not being the language of their own childhood and hence not having appropriate affective connotations, the L2 has failed to create an emotional bond with their relatives.

Furthermore, the bilinguals' comments suggest that whereas in the majority of the cases issues other than emotionality determine language choice, emotional responsiveness, or rather lack of it, may lead a bilingual speaker to rejection of a given language.[4] In fact, some Kazakh-Russian bilinguals go even further and label L2 expressions as *false*, *ugly*, or f*orbidden*. These perceptions are echoed in yet another bilingual respondent's words:

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[3] Kazakhstan is officially a bilingual country: the Kazakh language has the status of *state* language, while Russian, referred to as an *official* language, is used on daily basis. Hence, education in Kazakhstan is conducted in both languages.

[4] In point of fact, the lack of emotionality may not only cause a particular language to be rejected, at least for a while, but also it may lead a family member to feel unhappy about using L2 and resort to L1 for emotional expression, also when adopting so-called *baby talk*. For further information see: Marian, Neisser (2000:361-368); McMahill (2001:307-344); Aragno, Schlachet (1996:23-34).

I feel a member of my family only in Kazakh language. It is spontaneous. […]
When I want to say something with love to my family I use only Kazakh – Russian
'I love you' sounds different, wrong. I just feel like I am doing something forbidden
(Bayan, 20, L1 dominant).

These and similar responses suggest that the perception of the superior emotionality of L1 may have an effect on both the overall preference of language, visible in cases in which L2 was chosen initially, as well as the choice of language used for emotional expressions, such as terms of endearment. Furthermore, the consistency of lexical choices is also vital to note; specifically, the choice of L1 is referred to as *spontaneous*, *intimate*, *true*, and *natural*, whereas L2 use is depicted as *forbidden, false, wrong*. Irrefutably, the difference between these perceptions depicts a common experience of many bilingual speakers for whom the translation equivalents adopted for emotional speech acts are not perceived as equal.

Yet another nuance of this subject can be noted when linguistic preference is conflated with autobiographic memories. Indeed, this striking dependence, first observed and explored by Clachar (1999:31-52) and Arnold (1999:112-130), has also been subsequently problematised by many scholars in the field of psycholinguistics.[5] Drawing largely from bilingual writers' memoirs, the authors unanimously concluded that not only does the L1 become the language of personal involvement, it is also grounded in the emotional autobiographic experience of bilingual speakers. Hence, it is perceived as *real* since it *appears to elicit higher levels of positive arousal and mental imagery, perceived by the speakers as feelings of tenderness, intimacy, sincerity, spontaneity and 'wholesomeness'* (Pavlenko 2004:192). In fact, these assumptions provide an explanation of why one of the respondents, Ardasher, felt reluctant to use Russian with his niece.

At the same time, building on closer analysis of the participants' personal experience narratives about emotional events, it can also be presumed that the L1 becomes the language of personal involvement, while the L2 exists either exclusively in the realm of detachment and distance or, at least, is viewed as less emotional. In fact, these findings are compatible with empirical evidence alluded to by Javier and Marcos (1989:461-470), who present a valid argument for understanding that the chronologically first-learnt linguistic system is usually more emotion-laden and superior. What the authors further acknowledge, is that the above notion of emotional distance between the L1 and the L2 is directly linked to the code-switching process. Other authors concur with this presumption: in their studies, Bond and Lai (1986:179-182), demonstrate that linguistic code alterations may function as a distancing strategy, allowing the L2 users either to avoid anxiety-provoking subjects, or to express thoughts too disturbing in the L1 via the L2.[6]

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[5] Compare: Hoffman (1989); Kaplan (1993); Foster (1996); Lerner (1997).
[6] Compare: Kellman (2000); Novakovich, Shapard (2000).

L2 emotionality in family communication

Supported by their research, many scholars acknowledge that the assumptions advocated earlier in the discussion rest on a rather peculiar, erroneous view.[7] According to the authors, bilingual learners also experience emotional weight in the L2 since *intimacy is not created by a particular language*, but *[…] it is alluded by intimates* (Rodriguez 1982:50). Indeed, after a fascinating glimpse into Kazakh-Russian bilinguals' experience, one may presume that the L2 is not necessarily acknowledged as the language of detachment by the respondents:

Russian is my second family language. […] It is very personal and with my sisters and brothers I speak mostly Russian because that is what I have always spoken with them (Temirlan, 23, L1 dominant).

When I speak to my relatives, Russian is my favourite language for emotional speech. I think it is because I use it mostly with my parents. Sometimes I just switch to Russian when I feel really emotional (Kamila, 19, L1 dominant).

As seen in the responses above, not only did communication in L2 on a daily basis with one's family members lead many participants to switch to L2 in emotion-laden circumstances, but also L2 became a language of emotional importance.

A similar line of thought is expressed by yet another Kazakh-Russian bilingual, who claimed that:

Most of the time I spoke Russian with my husband but then the children were born and everything has changed. We decided to switch into Kazakh since we wanted them to learn their native language […]. At the time, we didn't live in Kazakhstan (Aigierim, 46, L1 dominant).

Additionally, it can be cogently argued that the socialisation process has an impact not only on overall language usage, but also the use of certain emotive speech acts and expressions, such as terms of endearment. Surprisingly, delving further into the field of bilingual mechanisms shows that despite a speaker's overall competence in the language, they may adopt the L2 for cooing and expressing affection to their family members:

When we moved out from Astana[8] to Artyon[9] I spoke Russian endearments while referring to my children and husband. Why? I think it was more connected to my reality, daily life (Assel, 43, L1 dominant).

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[7] See: McMahill (2001); Pavlenko (1998).
[8] The capital city of Kazakhstan.
[9] A city located in the north of Russia.

Pavlenko (2004:193-196) addresses this issue by pointing out that such a prolonged as well as strong interactional history of L2 communication, engaging the bilingual's feelings and thus the limbic system, may result in a shift in language dominance. Put succinctly, the L2 lexical items used by bilinguals obtain affective connotations, hence they become *their* words.[10]

According to Dewaele (2004:104) such an alteration in language preference coupled with secondary socialisation may be also accompanied by L1 attrition. As Pavlenko (2004:194-195) goes on to explain, many bilinguals lose the ease of expressions in the domain of feelings. Yet, as the forgoing analysis by the author indicates, the perceived emotionality of L1 is not affected by perceived L1 attrition. Be that as it may, the comments from Kazakh-Russian participants correspond to the author's assertion; the perception of L2 emotionality being shifted, it has formed multiple emotive connections in both languages:

[...] with my grandmother I use only Kazakh – it seems to be more emotional with her. With my parents I speak Russian, also about emotions (Azhar, 22, L2 dominant).

The comments above highlight the fact that many bilingual speakers use both languages to establish an emotional bond with their family members; in fact, both the emotionality and linguistic preference are tightly connected to the interlocutor.[11]

Conclusions

Irrefutably, the array of topics that come directly from the research discussed above show the notion of second language detachment to be both erroneous and simplistic. The research would also suggest that the primacy of the first language oversimplifies the reality of bilingual existence: the native language is not always perceived as *the language of emotions*.

Furthermore, the preliminary results demonstrate the existence of three core themes related to bilingual family communication: (1) L2 socialisation may affect both perceived language emotionality and language preference for emotional expressions; (2) many bilingual families prefer to perform affect in both Kazakh and Russian languages; (3) the language choice for emotive speech acts is highly affected by the interlocutors.

Nevertheless, the emotional bond of many bilinguals with their first language is a reality that deserves to be recognised. It is this reality that highlights the plight

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[10] This process is frequently recognised as *emotional internalisation*. See: Pavlenko (2004:194); Fries (1998:129).

[11] Compare: Fries (1998); Luykx (2003); Hoffman (1971); Zentella (1997).

of many Kazakh families experiencing the loss of the emotional connections to relatives who function in a language different from their own. This plight is poignantly worded by Akerke, a Kazakh-dominant mother of two students currently residing in Rzeszów:

It is important for me to be really understood by my daughter and son; they should know what I want to say. I think it is a way of getting closer […] and I'm afraid that they won't use their native language, Kazakh language. Our conversation is more emotional in Kazakh because only then we speak to each other straight from the heart.

Acknowledgements

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