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Family language policy and school language choice: pathways to bilingualism and multilingualism in a Canadian context

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a survey with 170 school-age children growing up with two or more languages in the Canadian province of Ontario where English is the majority language, French is a minority language, and numerous other minority languages may be spoken by immigrant or Indigenous residents. Within this context the study focuses on minority language transmission and maintenance, drawing on insights from family language policy and choice of language of schooling. I describe the general language-related characteristics of the households surveyed and discuss the strategies and resources that parents may use in order to place their children along several different bilingual or multilingual pathways. The results highlight the importance of the choice of language of communication between parents as a potential modelling and extra input opportunity in the household, in addition to the choice of language used by each parent to address a child directly. Furthermore, choice of language of schooling is associated with the likelihood of a child developing as a multilingual individual. Increasing access, inclusion and general enrolment in minority language education are seen as a way of increasing not only the level of bilingualism but also multilingualism in the province.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to offer some new perspectives on childhood bilingualism and multilingualism in Canada by viewing family language practices and schooling as two interconnected variables that can have a differential impact on the number of languages a child acquires and the type of bi/multilingualism (active vs. passive). The focus is on families with school-age children (4 years or older) who are developing as simultaneous (from birth) or sequential (emergent) bilinguals or multilinguals. The study draws on some of the theoretical insights and practical implications of (bi/multilingual) language socialisation (Bayley & Schecter, 2003; De Houwer, 2009; Lanza, 1992, 2004; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984, 2011; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; among others) and offers a discussion of family language policy (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008;

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King & Fogle, 2013; Schwartz, 2010; a.o.) and school choice (Allison, 2015; Dagenais, 2003; Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Markopoulos, 2009; Mady, 2010, 2013) in a Canadian context.

The overarching question I set out to explore is what are some of the salient characteristics of families who are able to raise bi/multilingual children in Canada; in other words, what (combinations of) family and educational resources can be leveraged by parents in order for their children to acquire the country's official languages (English and French) and, if applicable, also acquire heritage or Indigenous languages that may be spoken in the family or the community. While recognising that variables differ from one family to another and that educational options or resources also vary by region, my goal is to offer a discussion of a general framework and best practices for increasing bi/multilingual outcomes in Canada.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. In the next section, I discuss language socialisation and family language policy (FLP). In Section 3, I describe the Canadian context in which the present study was conducted, highlighting some relevant demographic, policy and educational aspects, including school choice and language of instruction. In Section 4, I describe the research design and methodological procedures of a survey study with 170 participants that was carried out in the Canadian province of Ontario and constitutes the source of empirical data for this article. In Section 5, I report the results of the survey and offer a general discussion. I conclude with remarks on the implications of this work for the larger Canadian context.

2. Language socialisation and FLP

Language socialisation is a concept with a broad scope: it encompasses, among other things, the role that language plays in how children grow up to be members of families and subsequently communities (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011). It is widely recognised that language socialisation shapes children's language development by situating it within social and cultural norms, beliefs and practices. For infants and young children (in Western societies), initial language socialisation typically occurs within the realm of the household/family; however, as exposure to outside factors increases with age (e.g. day care, schooling, interactions with peers or adults in the community, etc.), additional powerful socialisation forces come into play and affect language use. In the context of children growing up with more than one language, language socialisation is often related to language choice and use within the family (De Houwer, 2009; Lanza, 2004; Yamamoto, 2001; a.o.). Such issues are increasingly framed within the emerging field of FLP (Caldas, 2012; Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; King et al., 2008; Schwartz, 2010).

FLP operates within a socialisation framework and combines insights from (at least) two distinct theoretical fields: child language acquisition and language policy (King et al., 2008; Schwartz, 2010). Schwartz (2010) provides an overview of the literature on FLP and situates it as a research domain that takes into account socio-linguistic and socio-psychological perspectives on, among other things, intra-family factors such as family structure, parental education and acculturation, family cohesiveness and emotional relations, as well as family language ideology and management. Thus, some of FLP's goals include uncovering, describing and honing the theoretical underpinnings of explicit and implicit family rules, practices and ideologies about who speaks what language to whom in a household. This is often done in the context of minority language acquisition and maintenance, where

(at least one) adult family member speaks a minority language and is transmitting that language to her bi/multilingual child(ren). Thus, bilingual and multilingual families represent the primary object of interest and source of data in FLP. An important aspect of FLP is children's language choice and language mixing in family interactions, including parental discourse strategies (Lanza, 1992, 2004; a.o.). In addition, research has also focused on the amount, type and frequency of parental language input in bilingual and multilingual contexts (e.g. Cruz-Ferreira, 2006; De Houwer, 2007, 2011, 2014; De Houwer & Bornstein, 2016; Hoffmann & Ytsma, 2004; a.o.).

Another important aspect of FLP is what is generally known as family language use models (also called methods, strategies, approaches, etc.), such as: One-Person One-Language (OPOL/1P1L) where, in addressing the child, each parent adheres strictly to a language different from the other parent's language; Minority Language at Home (ML@H) where both parents speak the minority language to the child; Mixed Approach where one or both parents mix the languages in addressing the children; and Majority Language at Home (MajL@H) where both parents use the majority language exclusively and rely on other resources or strategies to raise bi/multilingual children. The best known among these models is OPOL, which has been studied extensively in bilingual contexts (Arnberg, 1987; De Houwer, 1990; Döpke, 1992; Harding & Riley, 1986; Juan-Garau & Perez-Vidal, 2001; Kasuya, 1998; Leopold, 1939–1949; Ronjat, 1913; Sondergaard, 1981; Slavkov, 2015; Takeuchi, 2006; a.o.).

Even though traditionally OPOL has been considered the best way to raise bilingual children, mixed outcomes are reported in the literature and a number of studies have questioned its effectiveness in ensuring that children develop as active bilinguals (i.e. not only understand but also speak both languages). For example, it has been argued that maximising minority language use through ML@H (when possible) may be a better family language use model (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004; De Houwer, 2009; Yamamoto, 2001). In addition, a Mixed Model may not be less successful than OPOL in ensuring that a child develops as an active bilingual (e.g. Patterson, 1999). In a well-known large-scale survey of bilingual children in Flanders, De Houwer (2003) found that in 27% of the families where one parent spoke Dutch, the majority language, and the other parent spoke another language, the children did not speak that other language (i.e. passive bilingualism). On the other hand, in families where both parents spoke the minority language (ML@H) or both parents spoke the minority and the majority language (Mixed Model), children had higher chances of being actively bilingual.¹ The question of differences between active and passive bi/multilingualism is of major interest in this article and will be discussed further in the following sections.

It is important to point out one potential flaw in the way the above family language models are defined: they generally focus on the language(s) spoken by the parents to the children and do not capture another important variable, the language spoken between the parents themselves, which may also play an important role in a child's development as a speaker of more than one language (for discussion see De Houwer, 2009; Yamamoto, 2001). More details on this aspect will be provided in the results and discussion sections.

Turning specifically to multilingualism, although less work has been done in such contexts, some of the above considerations have also been discussed. Braun and Cline (2010), for example, point out that trilingual families may also use OPOL although this strategy is

best suited for bilingual contexts and outcomes are even less stable when more than two languages are involved (see also Braun, 2006; Quay, 2001). A well-known typology of trilingualism is offered by Hoffmann (2001) who distinguishes among five general types: (1) trilingual children who grow up with two home languages different from the language spoken in the community; (2) children who are brought up in a bilingual community and where the home language is different from the two communal languages; (3) bilinguals who acquire a third language in the school context; (4) bilinguals who become trilingual due to immigration; and (5) children in trilingual communities. An important aspect of Hoffman's typology is that it takes into account both the social context and the specific family circumstances under which a child may develop as a multilingual. That is, with bilingualism, in principle the two languages can be supported at the home, but with multilingualism often times the community and school outside the household may provide input and opportunities for acquisition of one (or more) of the three languages, as illustrated by the typology. This point will become relevant in the next sections of the study.

In addition to the type of family language use model of exposure and support for bilingual and multilingual language development in childhood, FLP is also interested in broader issues of culture, identity, and parental attitudes and beliefs; these factors influence the quality and quantity of language input that bilingual and multilingual children receive and ultimately relate to their language outcomes. For example, De Houwer (1999, 2009) argues that positive attitudes and impact beliefs (i.e. the realisation that parents have an impact on children's language development) are an important factor that contributes to parental language choices and interactional strategies, and ultimately to children's linguistic repertoires. This aspect, although very important, falls outside of the scope of the current study.

To summarise, FLP is a newly emerging field combining insights from language socialisation, child language acquisition and language policy. FLP is interested in theoretical and practical issues related to how families spur and manage children's language development in bilingual and multilingual contexts, and relates to specific input strategies and models as well as broader issues of culture, identity and ideology (Schwartz, 2010). A well-defined and executed FLP, suitable for an individual family's particular circumstances and resources can be instrumental in ensuring optimal bi/multilingual outcomes. As such, the object of the current study is to describe the characteristics of families who are raising bi/multilingual children and to offer insights on successful FLP in a Canadian context.

Before proceeding to the next section, it is important to provide the operational definition of a bi/multilingual child adopted in this article. Definitions of bi/multilingualism are often proficiency-based and can range from complete and equal mastery of two or more languages to knowledge of just a few words in one of the languages. For the purposes of this study, I use functional proficiency (gleaned from parental reports of home language use, language of schooling and an inventory of the languages that a child speaks or understands) as a criterion; that is, when a child can function (or is in the process of learning how to function) in a particular language in a given setting, the child's proficiency in that language is considered sufficient to include the language in her bi/multilingual repertoire. To provide a specific example, if a child's main language of schooling is different from the language that the parents speak to her at home, then the child is considered to have functional proficiency in both of those languages. Similarly,

if a child functions in one language at home, in another language at school and in yet another language in social interactions outside of home and school, then the child is considered multilingual (see also the following sections for more on the distinction between passive and active bi/multilingualism).

The above definition of bi/multilingualism is also related to the notion of plurilingualism, which has been gaining an increasing level of recognition in recent years (Canagarajah, 2007, 2009; Coste, Moore, & Zarate 1997, 2009; Coste & Simon, 2009; Dagenais & Moore, 2008; Garcia, 2009a, 2009b; Marshall & Moore, 2013; Taylor & Snoddon, 2013; a.o.). Plurilingualism considers the different languages to which an individual may be exposed and use as a whole, rather than separately, and emphasises the use of different languages or varieties for different purposes. Thus, language competence is not treated as fixed and in isolation but as a form of a fluid and integrated linguistic, social and intercultural practice in an increasingly transnational world. Plurilingualism is distinguished from multilingualism as it focuses more on the individual level rather than the societal one and does not assume equal mastery in two or more languages. Plurilingual values were officially embraced in Europe with the introduction of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001). This has had a powerful impact among language scholars, educators, policy makers and various stakeholders. A ripple effect across the world has also been felt and plurilingual values are beginning to find their way in language policy, education and other levels of society in various countries, including Canada. For the purposes of this study, however, I use the term multilingualism as a general category that captures both individual and societal phenomena. Nonetheless, as already stated, equal proficiency in multiple languages is not assumed in this article.

3. Bilingualism and multilingualism in Canada: demographics, policy and school choice

Canada is a country with a rich and complex linguistic and cultural landscape comprised of two official languages, a steady influx of immigrants, and a number of Indigenous communities. It is important to note that official bilingualism applies at the federal level only (i.e. the federal administration and services); thus, even though many local services may also be offered in both languages, there are no legal requirements for that (except in New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province). The 2011 Canadian census indicates that about 17% of the population is able to conduct a conversation in both English and French, and 20% speaks a non-official language at home, either alone or combined with English and/or French (Statistics Canada, 2012).² In this context, a growing interest in multilingualism research can be observed (Dagenais, 2013; Duff, 2007; Lamarre & Dagenais, 2003; Sarkar & Low, 2012; a.o.).

The current study took place in Ontario, a province where the majority language is English, and where Canada's largest urban centre, Toronto, as well as the capital city, Ottawa, are located. The province has traditionally attracted high numbers of immigrants, is home to the largest Francophone population outside of Quebec as well as the highest number of Indigenous people (Statistics Canada, 2011); as such, numerous minority languages may be spoken at the family or community levels across the province. Ontario's education system is public and consists of district school boards that manage clusters of local schools following a provincially mandated curriculum. There are English and

Francophone regular/secular as well as Catholic school boards.³ French immersion programming, for which Canada is often cited as a model, is offered by the English school boards, as the clientele for such programmes is generally non-Francophone. The amount of instruction in French in such programmes varies by region within set provincial limits, with some school boards offering up to 100% of French content in certain grades, while others offering only certain subjects at various levels. Entry into the French immersion system is usually in kindergarten, at age 4 (early immersion), or in grade 4, at age 9 (middle immersion). Generally, exposure to French diminishes in the upper grades and at the high school level.

Parents can choose to enrol their children in either English or French immersion programmes but enrolment in French immersion is lower compared to English programmes (less than 20% of the total student population in 2013–2014 was enrolled in immersion, according to the Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). A recently heightened demand for immersion has made it difficult for school boards to provide enough places (in some cases immersion spots have been allotted through a lottery system or on a first-come first-served basis). At the same time, immersion education both in Ontario and in other provinces has been criticised as elitist and exclusive (Allison, 2015; Mady, 2010, 2013; Markopoulos, 2009; Willms, 2008; a.o.) for various reasons, such as: higher socio-economic status of children enrolled in these programmes; lower level of support for students with disabilities, as compared to English programmes; high rates of attrition for students with lower achievement (i.e. students switching to English programmes); and discouragement from enrolment for immigrant children who may still be in the process of learning English, with the implicit or explicit assumption that three languages (i.e. English, French and a heritage language) may be too much to handle. As such, discussions of access and equity in this type of French medium instruction have surfaced not only in Ontario but also across Canada.

In addition to French immersion programmes offered by the English school boards, Ontario has Francophone school boards offering education to children from French-speaking families. This type of education is delivered 100% in French in all grades (K-12), with English taught only as an additional subject. Access to such schools is restricted under the Canadian constitution to families where at least one of the parents is a Francophone or has received their education in French. However, Francophone boards are able to grant individual exceptions and admit students from non-Francophone families (e.g. Anglophones, immigrants, or others with non-French cultural or linguistic backgrounds).

While children educated in Francophone schools receive higher exposure to French as a medium of instruction and generally have better support in that language through their families than children enrolled in French immersion, in this article I consider these two types of education as a single variable. That is, I capitalise on the fact that both types of education involve instruction in French, which is a minority language in Ontario; although final outcomes in French-language proficiency may differ to a great extent, in both cases children acquire literacy skills and learn to function in French in at least a school setting, which provides a strong basis for developing and maintaining bilingualism or multilingualism. In this respect, it is also important to reiterate that the definition of bilingualism and multilingualism operationalised for the current study does not assume equal mastery in two or more languages, but rather an ability to function appropriately in a given social

or cultural domain, such as the family, school or community (but not necessarily in all of these domains in the same language). To repeat, for the purposes of this study, if a child's home language is English but school language is French (through either immersion or a Francophone school), the child will be considered bilingual. Similarly, if a child's family languages are English and a heritage language, and the child's school language is French, this child will be considered multilingual. More details on this will be provided in the next section.

Finally, in addition to mainstream schooling, which can be in English or French, Ontario offers support for heritage languages. This is typically done through International Languages Programs, commonly referred to as heritage-language schools or Saturday language schools, which offer optional language classes outside of regular programme hours (up to 2.5 hours per week at the primary school level, 3.5 hours per week in high school, usually on weekends). Access to such classes is offered by the province free of charge.⁴ However, they are not universally available across the province; that is, they are offered to immigrant/heritage-speaking children (and potentially other interested language learners) when sufficient numbers of speakers of a given language are available locally (usually in larger urban centres).

To summarise, in the above two sections I described factors from FLP and school choice (i.e. language of schooling) that are relevant to a child's development as a bi/multilingual speaker; I also provided some contextual information on the province in which this study took place. In what follows, I will offer more details about the study.

4. Research questions, design and procedures

Focusing on FLP and language of schooling as two important variables in terms of the languages that a child acquires, five general pathways are identified below, along with some (non-exhaustive) examples of how a child might be placed on any of them. These apply to the Ontario setting specifically, but are also generalisable across Canada.

- (1) *Monolingual Pathway 1O: Official (majority) language only*
- (2) *Bilingual Pathway 1O+1H: Official (majority) language plus a Heritage language*
- (3) *Bilingual Pathway 2O: Two Official languages (majority and minority)*
- (4) *Multilingual Pathway 2O+1H: Two Official languages plus a Heritage language*
- (5) *Other Multilingual Pathways*

The first pathway results in majority language monolingualism (i.e. English) and represents an outcome, for example, for English-speaking families who also choose English as a language of instruction for their children's schooling. In addition, however, immigrant or Indigenous families who choose English school programming may also place their children on this pathway, if they have shifted from their heritage language to majority language use in the household (i.e. if no FLP to transmit and maintain a heritage language is implemented).⁵ The second pathway involves transmission and maintenance of a heritage language at home and the majority language, English, at school. This pattern applies to households where an FLP to preserve a heritage language is in place but French as a medium of instruction is not chosen (recall the discussion of choice and access in Section 3).

The third pathway results in acquisition of both of Canada's official languages. For example, monolingual English-speaking families could place their children in French immersion or Francophone schools and set them on a course to official bilingualism. French-speaking families, on the other hand, could maintain French at home and send their children to English schools, resulting in overall similar linguistic outcomes (official bilingualism). French-speaking families could also choose Francophone schooling and let their children acquire the majority language, English, through community exposure, for example (in addition to English being taught as a subject in Francophone schools). Immigrant families could also place their children on this pathway by choosing French medium instruction for them and adopting English in the household. In the latter case, even though the child will become bilingual in Canada's two official languages, due to the FLP focusing on the majority language instead of a heritage language, the heritage language will be lost.

The fourth pathway, which only applies to families where a heritage language is spoken, has a multilingual outcome. In this scenario, families will transmit and maintain heritage languages at home, children will be enrolled in a French-language programme (immersion or a Francophone school), and English, the majority language, will be acquired through social exposure (and also at school in the case of immersion programmes where English instruction exists from early on, and/or becomes prominent in the higher grades of primary school and in high school). The fifth pathway, which is also multilingual, is an umbrella for various other FLP and school choice patterns, including two family members speaking two different minority languages at home or cases where other combinations of parental and educational resources result in multilingualism (recall Hoffman's typology in Section 2).

It is important to emphasise that the above scenarios represent just a few possible examples of combinations of home and school resources that lead to different linguistic outcomes. Other family circumstances and language policies that are not discussed here could also result in a child being placed along one of the five pathways.

The overall picture that emerges from the above description is that in Ontario, and more generally in Canada, it is possible for either English-speaking or French-speaking families to raise bilingual children; heritage language speaking families seem to have an advantage because their children have a chance of becoming multilingual if they add both of Canada's official languages to the language already spoken at home. On the other hand, it is possible, and in fact common, for potentially bilingual or multilingual children to become monolingual if the family focuses on the majority language, English, in both the FLP and the choice of school language. In other words, in a Canadian context, it is possible to increase a child's linguistic outcomes even if a child has monolingual language resources within the family, and at the same time it is possible to limit the child's linguistic outcomes even if at the family level opportunities for transmitting minority languages exist.

As stated at the outset, the purpose of this article is to examine a sample of families who are raising bilingual and multilingual children (pathways 2–5) and describe their characteristics, including home strategies that fit within the domains of FLP and school language choice. I will not focus on the differences between heritage languages and French as a minority language, even though the latter clearly has an advantage due to its official status in the country and higher presence in the educational system. Nonetheless, in

the study below I will use the term minority language to include any language other than English in Ontario; the goal is to de-emphasise division lines or unequal status between official and non-official minority languages and capitalise on the idea that minority languages need support through both educational and family resources, regardless of whether they are recognised as official or not. Ultimately, this reflects a holistic rather than political interest in bilingualism and multilingualism. With this background in mind, the following research questions were formulated:⁶

R1: What are some of the general characteristics of bi/multilingual families in Ontario in terms of family language policy and school language choice?

R2: What are some of the factors that may have a differential impact on a child developing as a bilingual as opposed to a multilingual individual?

R3: What are some of the factors that may have a differential impact on a child developing as an active versus a passive bi/multilingual (i.e. number of languages understood vs. number of languages spoken)?

In order to address the above questions, a research survey with families where at least one adult family member was able to speak to a child in a language other than English, the majority language, was conducted. The survey contained questions relating to FLP, school language choice and other demographic information. To maximise the potential number of participants, the survey was designed to be completed by one adult household member (parent/guardian) who provided information about the rest of the family. Single-parent families were also welcome to participate and in those cases the information fields for parent/guardian 2 were marked *n/a* which was subsequently taken into account in the analysis.

With regard to the children, the survey asked questions pertaining to the following categories: language of current school programme, attendance at a heritage school programme (if applicable), age, number of siblings, languages exposed to within the first year after birth, languages currently understood, languages currently spoken, reading and writing abilities (if any) for each language listed, languages used to watch television or play video games and languages in which parents read books with/to the child. With regard to the parents, questions pertained to the following categories: native languages, current languages in which they were most comfortable, languages spoken between parents and languages spoken to the child by each parent. Questions pertaining to the languages spoken to the child by other household members (caregivers/relatives) as well as languages spoken among siblings were also included. In addition, the survey asked several qualitative, open-ended questions with regard to the parents' satisfaction with the choice of language of schooling for their children (not discussed in detail here). The full list of questions in the survey is included in the [appendix](#) of this article.

The survey was available in English and French and was distributed in both paper and online formats to offer some equity among families with various socio-economic status and access to technology. Multiple channels of distribution were used, including community organisations, schools representing different school boards (programmes in both English and French, as well as heritage-language programmes), and the researcher's network of personal and professional contacts. Participants were also asked to distribute the survey through their networks when possible (snowball effect). Participants' responses

came from across Ontario, although most were from the eastern parts of the province, close to the border with Quebec, where the researcher's network was strongest. This was anticipated and not viewed as problematic, as the purpose of the research was to identify families within the province who were raising bi/multilingual children and describe their family language policies and school choices, rather than ensure equal geographic distribution of participants over the province. The survey received more than 400 total responses which underwent the following validation protocol: participants outside Ontario were excluded and responses with incomplete, inconsistent or contradictory information were eliminated; this reduced the number of surveys to 170. Each of these 170 responses corresponds to one child (families with more than one child had the option of completing the survey for each child or just for one, depending on how much time they were willing to invest to participate).

5. Results

In this section I describe general characteristics of the sample and then offer results from logistic regression analyses identifying factors within FLP and school choice that may have a statistically significant impact on the children's linguistic outcomes.

The 170 responses retained for analysis described bilingual and multilingual children who represented over 40 languages from various language families. The distribution of the children according to the overall home language use model adopted in the family is shown in [Table 1](#).

As indicated, the highest number of children (73) was exposed to a Mixed home language model, where at least one parent uses more than one language to address the child (i.e. does not adhere strictly to a single language in communicating with the child). The second most common model was ML@H, followed by OPOL. Within the OPOL category, the data are subdivided into cases where one of the parents speaks the majority language (English) to the child or where each parent speaks a different minority language to the child. The nine children in the MajL@H category represent cases where both parents speak English, the majority language, to the child, but are nonetheless raising bi/multilingual children. Single-parent families ($n = 4$) were included in models 1, 2 or 5, but not in the OPOL model.

To unpack the data further, the languages spoken by the various adult household members to the children as well as the languages spoken among siblings are reported along a minority–majority language continuum in [Table 2](#).

It is worth noting that most adults speak to the child or with each other a minority language only. The same applies, although to a lesser extent, to the languages spoken

Table 1. Home language use model.

Home language use model	Number/percentage of children
1. Mixed	73 (43%)
2. ML@H	54 (32%)
3. OPOL: 1 maj + 1 min	25 (15%)
4. OPOL: 2 min	9 (5%)
(OPOL total)	(34 (20%))
5. MajL@H	9 (5%)
Total	170

Table 2. Household language patterns: minority–majority language continuum for adults.

	Languages parents speak to child		Languages in which parents read books to child	Languages parents speak with each other	Languages other adult household members speak to child
	Parent 1	Parent 2			
Min language only	95 (56%)	86 (51%)	27 (16%)	80 (47%)	35 (21%)
Min language primarily	31 (18%)	29 (17%)	38 (22%)	16 (9%)	6 (3.5%)
Maj language primarily	25 (15%)	16 (9%)	68 (40%)	25 (15%)	6 (3.5%)
Maj language only	19 (11%)	35 (21%)	22 (13%)	45 (27%)	16 (9%)
N/A	0	4 (2%)	15 (9%)	4 (2%)	107 (63%)

to the children by other adult members of the household (caregivers/relatives). As such, the sample suggests a strong commitment to minority language transmission and maintenance by the adult household members. However, this finding does not apply to the books that parents read to their children since there is a total of 90 cases where the parents in the household use English only or English primarily, compared to 65 instances of a minority language only or minority language primarily.

Focusing on parents exclusively, the survey asked about number of native languages (i.e. languages exposed to from birth) in case parents who were bilingual/multilingual from birth themselves had higher chances of raising bi/multilingual children. These data are reported in [Figure 1](#) (see also regression results).

Turning to the children's characteristics, the 170 children in the sample had a mean age of 8;8 (median = 8; SD = 3.24). The children's language-related variables are summarised next, starting with [Table 3](#). As indicated, not all children speak the same number of languages they understand. More details on this aspect are provided in [Table 4](#).

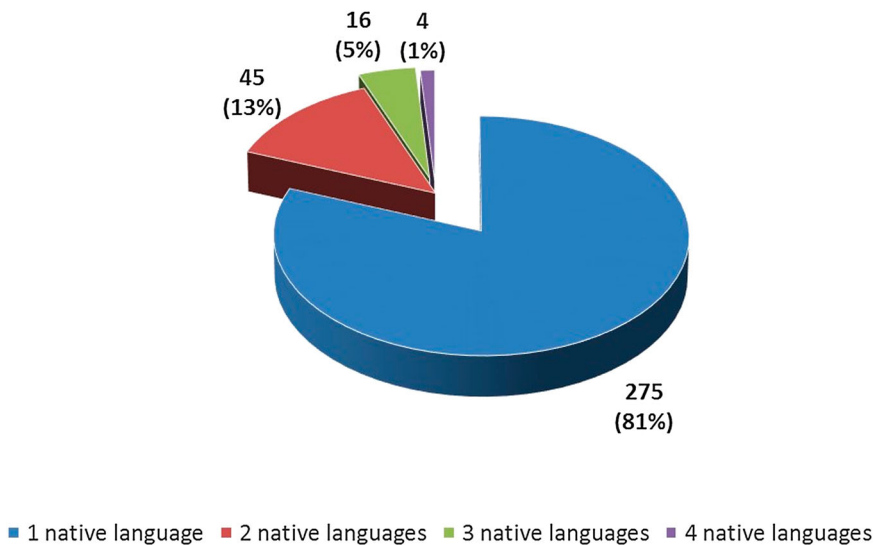
**Figure 1.** Parents' number of native languages.

Table 3. Children's number of languages: understood, spoken and exposed to from birth.

	Languages understood (by number of children)	Languages spoken (by number of children)	Languages child was exposed to within the first year of life (by number of children)
1. Language	N/A	18 (10%)	105 (62%)
2. Languages	79 (46%)	78 (46%)	58 (34%)
3. Languages	83 (49%)	68 (40%)	4 (2%)
4. Languages	7 (4%)	5 (3%)	2 (1%)
5. Languages	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Total	170	170	170

Table 4 indicates that among the bilingual children 16 were passive bilinguals, which represents 20% of that subgroup. As for the multilinguals, 19 were passive which represents 21% of that subgroup. Similar rates of passive bilingualism are reported in the literature (De Houwer, 2009; Yamamoto, 2001). As indicated earlier, the question of which factors may contribute to a child having a higher likelihood of being actively bi/multilingual is of key interest in this article and will be discussed further below.

Additionally, the children's language use and literacy were examined on a minority-majority language continuum in **Table 5** which shows an important contrast with **Table 2**: while parents mostly focus on the minority language in their household use, children's preferences are the opposite. This is especially the case when it comes to media/technology, where 126 (79%) of the children who watch TV or play video games do so either exclusively or primarily in English.

Finally, the children's programme/language of schooling (English, Francophone or French Immersion) is reported in **Table 6** along with the number of bilingual vs. multilingual children per programme. As the data indicate, most children were enrolled in a French-language programme representing education in a minority language medium. It should also be mentioned that of the 170 children enrolled in the regular programmes indicated above, 69 (41%) were also enrolled in heritage-language programmes in various languages other than English and French.

Apart from examining the data descriptively, two logistic regression models (binomial) were executed to determine whether there were significant associations for some of the above family characteristics and educational choices with the level and type of bi/multilingualism for the children in the sample. Due to sample size and distributional limitations, the regression models were restricted to nine predictor/independent variables (IVs) and two response/dependent variables (DVs) listed below. The two DVs correspond to research questions R2 and R3, respectively.

Table 4. Passive versus active bi/multilingualism.

	Number of languages understood/ Number of languages spoken	Number of children	Subtotal
Bilingual passive	2/1	16/79 (20%)	16/170 (10%)
Bilingual active	2/2	63/79 (80%)	63/170 (37%)
Multilingual passive	3/1	2/91 (2%)	19/170 (11%)
	3/2	15/91 (17%)	
	4/3	2/91 (2%)	
Multilingual active	3/3	66/91 (73%)	72/170 (42%)
	4/4	5/91 (5%)	
	5/5	1/91 (1%)	
			Total: 170

Table 5. Languages with siblings, TV/video games, and literacy.

	Language(s) child speaks with siblings	Language(s) in which child watches TV or plays video games	Language(s) in which child has some reading/writing skills
Min language only	16 (10%)	8 (5%)	13 (8%)
Min language primarily	31 (18%)	31 (18%)	39 (23%)
Maj language primarily	45 (26%)	67 (39%)	79 (46%)
Maj language only	43 (25%)	59 (35%)	23 (14%)
N/A	(35) (21%)	(5) (3%)	(16) (9%)
Total	135	164	154

IVs:

- (1) Language of Schooling (English/French).
- (2) Heritage-language school attendance (Yes/No/NA).
- (3) Home Language Use Model (Mixed/ML@H/OPOL: 1 maj + 1 min/OPOL: 2 min/MajL@H).
- (4) Languages spoken between parents (Min only/Min primarily/Maj primarily/Maj only/NA).
- (5) Languages in which parents read books to children (Maj only/Some min/NA).
- (6) Languages in which children watch TV or play video games (Min only/Min primarily/Maj primarily/Maj only).
- (7) Literacy (reading/writing skills) in a minority language (Yes/No/NA).
- (8) Languages children speak with siblings (Maj only/Some min spoken/NA).
- (9) Parents' number of native languages.

DVs:

- (A) Bilingual vs. Multilingual Outcome.
- (B) Active vs. Passive Outcome (i.e. same number of languages understood and spoken vs. higher number of languages understood than spoken).

The two models/analyses were executed separately for each of the two DVs using the same IVs. For DV (A), significant associations were found with IVs (1), (2), (3), (4) and (7). Starting with language of schooling (1), holding all other variables constant, children enrolled in programmes where French was the language of instruction had a much higher likelihood (89%) of being multilingual, as compared with children enrolled in English programmes (log odds/coefficient: 2.10; OR: 8.13; $p < .001$). For heritage-language schooling (2), children who were enrolled in such programmes had a higher likelihood

Table 6. Number of bilingual and multilingual children by language of schooling.

Program of schooling	Number of bilingual children	Number of multilingual children	Total
English	29 (17%)	16 (9%)	45 (27%)
French immersion	20 (12%)	52 (31%)	72 (42%)
Francophone school	30 (18%)	23 (14%)	53 (31%)
Total French language	(50 (29%))	(75 (44%))	(125 (74%))
Total	79	91	170

(85%) of being multilingual than children who did not attend such programmes (log odds/coefficient: 1.77; OR: 5.87; $p < .001$). For home language use model (3), no significant differences were found for the Mixed, ML@H and OPOL groups; however, holding all other variables constant, families who used the MajL@H strategy had lower odds of having a multilingual child than families using a Mixed, ML@H or OPOL strategy (log odds/coefficient: -3.70 ; OR: 0.03; probability: -0.024 ; $p < .05$). For language spoken between parents (4), holding all other variables constant, families where the parents spoke the majority language primarily or exclusively with each other had lower chances of having a multilingual child than parents who spoke a minority language exclusively with each other (Maj primarily log odds/coefficient: -1.88 ; OR: 0.15; probability: -0.13 ; $p < .05$; Maj exclusively log odds/coefficient: -2.54 ; OR: 0.08; probability -0.07 ; $p < .01$). Even families where the minority language was spoken primarily between the two parents showed a negative association with the DV compared with families where parents spoke a minority language exclusively with each other; however, this finding was not significant, despite being consistent with the general pattern observed for this factor. Finally, for literacy (7), holding all other variables at a fixed value, presence of some reading or writing skills in a minority language strongly increased the probability (91%) of a child being multilingual, as compared to a child acquiring literacy only in the majority language (log odds/coefficient: 2.35; OR: 10.51; $p < .01$). The remaining IVs, (5), (6), (8) and (9), were not significantly associated with DV (A).

Turning to the results for the second dependent variable (B), active vs. passive outcomes, significant associations were found with IVs (2), (7) and (8). For heritage-language schooling (2), holding all other variables constant, children enrolled in such programmes had a higher likelihood of being actively bilingual or multilingual (i.e. understanding and speaking the same number of languages) compared with children who did not attend such programmes (log odds/coefficient: 1.21; OR: 3.36; probability: 0.77; $p < .05$). For languages spoken with siblings (7), children who made some use of a minority language in communicating with their siblings had a higher chance of being active bi/multilinguals than children who used the majority language exclusively in talking with their siblings (log odds/coefficient: 2.28; odds ratio: 9.76; probability: 0.91; $p < .01$). Finally, presence of some reading or writing skills in a minority language (in addition to majority language literacy) increased the probability (80%) of a child being an active bi/multilingual as compared to a child acquiring literacy only in the majority language (log odds/coefficient: 1.39; odds ratio: 4.02; $p < .05$). The remaining IVs, (1), (2), (4), (5), (6) and (9), were not significantly associated with DV (B).

6. Discussion

The first research question for this study sought to establish some of the salient characteristics of a sample of bilingual and multilingual children in the Canadian province of Ontario. As bilingualism and multilingualism are phenomena affected by a complex interplay of factors, no single approach can be identified as superior. However, the descriptive data show that most parents (and other adult household members, when applicable) used a minority language exclusively or primarily in communicating with the children (recall Table 2). On the other hand, most children used the majority language in communicating with siblings and in engaging with multimedia resources (TV and video games); in

addition, most children were acquiring literacy in the majority language primarily or exclusively (recall Table 5). Thus, the overall picture that emerges from the data is one where parents are trying to privilege minority languages, whereas many of the children are (becoming) dominant in the majority language. Such a picture is not uncommon in minority language situations and is indicative of the typical challenges that FLP faces in keeping the majority language from taking over (Fishman, 1991, 2001; Hakuta & D'Andrea, 1992; Lambert, 2008; Schwartz, 2010; a.o.). What is interesting in the case of Ontario (and potentially across the rest of English-speaking Canada), however, is that through the availability of minority language education in French (immersion and Franco-phone schooling) children are able to not only acquire and/or maintain French, but potentially an additional language, if a heritage language is spoken in the family. Of the 170 children in the sample, 125 (74%) were enrolled in a French-language programme (Table 6) and this group of children contained the highest number of multilinguals (44%) in the sample. These children were thus placed along the two most beneficial linguistic outcome pathways (4–5) identified in Section 3 of this article, and were set to acquire not only Canada's two official languages from an early age but also the heritage languages present in the household.

This relates to the second research question in this study which addresses the factors that have a differential impact on whether a child develops as a bilingual or a multilingual individual. For the children where this was a possibility (i.e. a heritage language was present in the household) a logistic regression analysis revealed that school choice was a very strong predictor of multilingualism. This should come as no surprise, since schooling a child in a minority language different from another minority language acquired at home, and in addition acquiring the majority language (which is to some degree inevitable through community, home and/or other school resources) is a well-recognised pathway to multilingualism (recall Hoffman's 2001 typology described earlier). The second significant predictor variable, enrolment in a heritage-language programme does not have such an obvious relationship with multilingualism, as a child could just as easily be enrolled in such a programme and still be placed on a bilingual pathway (e.g. pathway 2, section 3). Thus, one might wonder why there was a significant association between heritage-language classes and multilingualism. A possible explanation would be that parents who send their children to such classes on weekends (i.e. those who value heritage-language maintenance) also value multilingualism and thus enrol their children in French programmes for the regular weekday schooling of their children. In other words, this variable may be an indicator of positive attitudes and commitment to multilingualism and thus affect the outcomes in the regression model presented earlier.

In terms of overall model of home language use, the findings did not support previous suggestions in the literature that ML@H may be superior to OPOL or other approaches, nor were there any differences between the outcomes with parents using OPOL vs. Mixed strategies. A future study with a larger sample size may be able to find support for such potential differences (cf. De Houwer, 2009; Yamamoto, 2001; a.o.). Nonetheless, the data in the current study clearly indicate that in the few cases where the majority language was used exclusively at home, multilingual outcomes among the children were less likely.

An important finding of this study is the significant association between the extent to which parents use a minority language with each other and the likelihood of a child being multilingual. This is a factor worth highlighting because family language use models

typically focus on the languages parents speak directly to children and less so on the languages parents speak with each other. While it is logical to assume that the languages spoken directly to children have a more direct impact on bi/multilingual outcomes, the languages spoken between parents increase the frequency of input and thus make a difference (De Houwer, 2009, 2011). Additionally, this type of input may have different quality, as parents may use more complex vocabulary and sentence structure when speaking to each other, as opposed to when speaking directly to children. Finally, from a family socialisation perspective, a minority language spoken between the parents at home is an important modelling opportunity which may also set explicit and/or implicit language use expectations for the household. Thus, the study's finding that a higher degree of majority language use between the parents has a limiting effect on multilingual outcomes for the children fits well in this context.

The last research question in this study addresses the factors related to a child's development as an active or passive bi/multilingual. Three variables in the regression model had significant positive associations with this outcome; these included heritage-language school enrolment, use of minority language with a sibling and the development of literacy skills in a minority language. It is worth mentioning that what these variables seem to have in common is a strong level of active commitment on the parents' part. That is, one could argue that a higher degree of effort and time investment from the parents is necessary to help a child acquire minority language literacy, to commit to heritage-language classes on weekends, and to institute a family policy that encourages or possibly requires siblings to speak in a minority language with one another. Conversely, some of the other factors examined in the study, such as reading books to the child in a minority language or letting the child watch TV or engage with multimedia resources in a minority language, seem to have a somewhat lower effort and time commitment value. Furthermore, the latter two variables tend to focus more on comprehension and less on production, and this may be an additional explanation as to why a significant positive association with active bi/multilingualism was not found. Of course, this does not mean that reading books to children or selecting appropriate video and technology resources in a minority language should not be encouraged in FLP. Such strategies make good sense and are used extensively by many bi/multilingual families; thus, they must not be dismissed even though they were not identified as significant predictors in the regression analysis. In addition, a larger data sample may be able to validate minority language book reading and technology use in the development of active bi/multilingualism.

Before proceeding with the conclusion, some limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. As already indicated, a larger data sample would have provided stronger results for certain aspects of the regression analysis. In addition, the fact that the survey was accessible only in Canada's two official languages, English and French, and not in various other minority languages, may have limited the willingness or ability to participate among (immigrant) populations with weaker proficiency levels in those languages. In addition, even though a number of paper-based questionnaires were distributed, most of the data came through online sampling, and thus factors such as technological literacy and also potentially socio-economic status (i.e. access to technology) may have played a role. In terms of survey design, it should be noted that passive/active bilingualism for the children was determined by parental reports (i.e. child's number of languages understood vs. spoken), which I consider to be an accurate overall measure; at the same time,

the nature of the study did not allow for more sophisticated and direct testing of the children's proficiency levels in the various languages involved.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impact of FLP and school language choice on bilingualism and multilingualism in the Canadian province of Ontario. In terms of FLP, not all predictors were associated with the language outcomes considered, but this does not mean that any of them should be dismissed at this point as future work may validate many of the FLP strategies listed above.

Language of communication between parents, minority language literacy and language spoken with siblings were some of the factors shown to impact a child's linguistic outcomes. With regard to schooling, minority language programmes (i.e. French immersion and Francophone schools) were shown to have a positive association with multilingualism (in addition to supporting bilingualism in Canada's two official languages). As such, the overall picture that emerges is one in which families that combine appropriate family language policies and minority language schooling have good chances of increasing their children's linguistic outcomes. This, however, may seem too optimistic of a picture since less than 20% of the students in the province benefit from French-language medium instruction.⁷ Furthermore, this cross-sectional study is not able to predict whether the minority languages that the child participants in the sample acquire will be retained in the long-term.

In terms of French as a medium of instruction, the province needs to make further investments and implement more inclusive and equitable policies that would potentially allow a larger population to experience the benefits of such programmes (recall the discussion in Section 3). In terms of heritage-language programming, the province demonstrates commitment to diversity as it subsidises such programmes (this is not necessarily the case in other provinces, where heritage-language schools may not be funded by public education). At the same time, heritage-language classes in Ontario face challenges such as grouping together children of various language abilities and different ages; in addition, classes tend to be available in larger urban centres where sufficient speakers of a given heritage language reside, and as such do not support heritage-language learning in smaller towns or rural areas with lower concentrations of immigrants.

At the end of this article, I would like to offer a qualitative comment provided by one of the survey participants who, in the context of a Canadian province where English is the majority language, stated that 'You have to try really hard not to learn English'. This view relates to what I will call non-overlapping strategies between FLP and school choice. As illustrated earlier, Anglophone or Francophone families can focus on one language through FLP and choose the other language for schooling; this would likely result in a bilingual child. Heritage-language families, on the other hand, can raise multilingual children by making use of the following non-overlapping choices: Heritage language through FLP, French-language instruction as a school choice, and English through community interactions (and also at school since English classes are included in all French medium instruction). In theory, then, if non-overlapping language strategies are adopted as a best practice at the family and educational levels, all children in Ontario, and potentially the rest of Canada, can become bilingual and many of them multilingual.

While this may seem simplistic and clearly far from current reality, I believe that embracing non-overlapping strategies to a higher degree may offer an increase in bi/multilingual outcomes in the country.

Notes

1. Note that De Houwer cautions against the use of the terms *active* versus *passive* bilingual and prefers describing children in terms of number of languages understood vs. spoken. I use these terms throughout the article because of their convenience and higher recognition.
2. While the term *non-official language* is sometimes used in government discourse, in the rest of this paper I use the term *heritage language* to refer to both immigrant languages and Indigenous languages in Canada. Indigenous languages, even though a distinct category on a number of historical, cultural, political and linguistic dimensions, are included in the heritage category as they relate to Canada's cultural and linguistic heritage, despite the differences with immigrant languages and cultures. Also note that the data sample collected for the present study included a very limited number of Indigenous language speaking participants and thus a separate analysis for this group was not possible. For work on FLP and schooling relating specifically to Indigenous populations, I refer interested readers to Patrick, Budach, and Muckpaloo (2013) and Rowan (2014), among others.
3. For historical reasons, Catholic school boards are publicly funded in Ontario but not necessarily in other provinces.
4. A nominal materials fee may be collected by some school boards.
5. It is important to note that in Ontario French is taught as a required subject in schools, even if an English programme is chosen for the main language of instruction. Such French second language programmes, known as Core French, are not content-based, have lower number of hours (compared to French immersion), and typically result in lower proficiency. Thus, Core French students are not considered to have met the functional bi/multilingualism criterion adopted in this study and are included in pathway 1. While this decision may be somewhat conservative and even unfair to Core French learners with strong motivation and possibly higher language aptitude, research suggests that graduates of such programmes across Canada are generally not able to communicate in French (see Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009, for an overview of issues and studies).
6. This article is based on the results of a larger ongoing project and only a subset of the data and research questions are discussed here.
7. This estimate is based on data from school year 2013–2014 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) and includes enrolment in French immersion programs and Francophone school boards, but excludes Core French or other French as a second language instruction that is not content-based (see also note 5).

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Appendix. Survey Questions

Home and School Languages

Nikolay Slavkov, University of Ottawa

General Information

1. **Current school programme of your child:**
(English/Early French Immersion/Middle French Immersion/Late French Immersion/French/Other, please specify)
2. **City and name of current school board:**
3. **Province:**
4. **If applicable, previous program of your child:**
5. **Name of Current School:**
6. **Grade:**
7. **Child's Age:**
8. **Number of Siblings:**
9. **Have you already completed this survey for another child in your household?**
(Yes/No)
10. **Is your child enrolled in any International Languages Programs (Heritage Schools)?**
(Yes/No) (If yes, please specify language and school)

Parents/Guardians' Information

11. **Parent 1/Guardian 1's native language(s):**
(If you were exposed to more than one language from birth, list as many as apply)
12. **Parent 1/Guardian 1 is currently most comfortable using the following language(s):**
(If more than one, list the one in which you are most comfortable first; leave blank if same as previous question)
13. **Parent 2/Guardian 2's native language(s):**
(If you were exposed to more than one language from birth, list as many as apply)
14. **Parent 2/Guardian 2 is currently most comfortable speaking the following language(s):**
(If more than one, list the one in which you are most comfortable first; leave blank if same as previous question)
15. **At home, Parent 1/Guardian 1 speaks the following language(s) to the child:**
(If more than one, list the most frequently used language first)
16. **At home, Parent 2/Guardian 2 speaks the following language(s) to the child:**
(If more than one, list the most frequently used language first)
17. **With each other, parents/guardians speak the following language(s):**
(If more than one, list the most frequently used language first)
18. **Any other languages spoken to the child by other household members or relatives:**
(If more than one, list the most frequently used language first)

Child's Information

19. **Initial language exposure.** Language(s) that parents/guardians spoke to child as a baby (during the first year after birth):
(If more than one, list the language that the child heard most frequently first)
20. **Child's languages now.** Child can currently understand the following language(s):
(List the language that the child understands best first)
21. **Child's languages now.** Child can currently speak the following language(s):
(List the language that the child speaks best first)
22. **Child's languages now.** Child speaks the following language(s) with siblings (if applicable):
(List the most frequently used language first)

Additional Information

23. **If applicable, list all languages in which the child has some reading and/or writing skills:**
(If more than one, list the language with the highest reading and/or writing skills first)
24. **If applicable, list the language(s) in which parents/guardians read books together with the child:**
(List the language in which you read together with your child most often first)
25. **List the language(s) in which your child watches TV and/or plays computer games:**
(List the most frequently used language first)

26. **If you have more than one child, do you find that the older one(s) is/are better at speaking a minority language (i.e. a language other than English) than the younger one(s)?**
(Yes/No)
 27. **Are you happy with your choice of the main language of schooling for your child?**
(For example, if your child's main language of schooling is English, are you happy you chose that over French Immersion? Or, if your child's main language of schooling is French, through French immersion or a French school board, are you glad you chose that over English?): (Yes/No)
 28. **Provide any details about your answer above, if you wish:**
(Leave blank if you do not wish to provide details)
 29. **Any additional comments or information that you would like to share?**
(Leave blank if you do not wish to provide additional comments or information)
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