

Greek-Spanish Community: The Maintenance of the Spanish Language in Mixed Families



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Abstract The present chapter focuses on the language maintenance of Spanish in the context of Greek-Spanish families. It explores the thoughts, perceptions and attitudes of Spanish parents of Greek-Spanish families, regarding their language and their bilingualism, the language ability and use of Spanish in the family, as well as the use of any reinforcement practices of Spanish. To study these issues, qualitative research was conducted, using semi-structured interviews that were administered to seven Greek-Spanish families living in Thessaloniki, Greece. In general, language shift towards Greek was observed, due to the fact that the practices and efforts to reinforce Spanish become weaker over the years.

Keywords Language maintenance · Family language policy · Greek-Spanish families · Language communities · Bilingualism

1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the maintenance of the Spanish language in mixed marriage families in the Greek-Spanish community in the city of Thessaloniki, Greece. Due to increased immigration and, consequently, the dissemination of multilingualism, the study of mixed families (i.e. consisting of couples with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds) is a question that not only concerns the social sciences, but also public opinion. In addition, it is generally known that Spanish is a prestigious language and spread worldwide, since it ranks as the second most spoken native language in the world, after Chinese mandarin (Fernandez Vitores 2014: 5). Also, if we include speakers who use Spanish as a foreign language then the number of Spanish speakers worldwide exceeds 548 million (Fernandez Vitores 2014: 5). It is, therefore, easily understood why this language is being studied. The different

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approach to the language in our research is that we have studied it in a context where the Greek language is dominant and Spanish has no direct utilitarian value. Thus, it is interesting to study this language as a mother tongue in such an environment.

Consequently, in this research, we aim to explore the thoughts, perceptions and attitudes of parents in Greek-Spanish families, regarding their language and bilingualism, linguistic competences and the use of Spanish in the family. Additionally, we examine whether parents use any practices to reinforce Spanish within the family and what these practices are. Through all this, we intend to point out the general tendency of maintenance or shift of the Spanish language in Greek-Spanish families in Greece.

2 Theoretical Framework

In order to conduct the research, it was necessary to study a series of concepts that constitute its basis. Thus, we examined the pluralistic definition of bilingualism/multilingualism (see Table 3, at the end of this chapter) and its different types. We also define the terms of bilingualism and diglossia (see Table 1).

We also focus on the definition of the two languages of the individual (strong and weak language, first and second language, foreign language) (Table 2).

Furthermore, we analyzed the issue of language maintenance or shift and the factors that influence it. According to Myers-Scotton (2002, as cited in Tsokalidou 2012: 70), language maintenance can be defined as maintenance of the ethnic language from generation to generation. Similarly, Pauwels (2004: 719) and Sella-Mazi (2001: 95) state that it is the condition in which a speaker, a group of speakers or a community of speakers continues to use his/her language in some or all areas of life, despite competition with the dominant language, which tends to be the main or only language.

Finally, we focus on language policies and, especially, the family language policies, which are associated with linguistic practices, ideologies and beliefs about language and planning or management of a language (Spolsky 2004: 5) by the members of a family.

Moreover, it was important to examine the context of our research. Particularly, we studied the diachronic relations (political, economic, cultural, etc.) between the two countries (Greece, Spain), the dissemination of Spanish in today's world and

Table 1 Definition of Bilingualism versus Diglossia

Bilingualism vs Diglossia	
Bilingualism	Diglossia
The person's ability to use more than one language (Baker 2001: 89)	The coexistence and use of different varieties of the same language (Ferguson, 1959 as cited in Baker 2001: 89; Calvet 1999: 43–44; Papapavlou 1997: 35; Sella-Mazi 2001: 85; Tsokalidou 2012: 31)

Table 2 Definitions of the two languages of the individual

The two languages of the individual	
Strong language	Weak language
It has numerical, political, and economic superiority over other languages in the wider context or the family context (Tsokalidou 2012: 69).	It is used by the numerical and socio-politically weak groups of a country, and it does not have any official power (Tsokalidou 2012: 69).
First language	Second language
We learn it first or we use it more or it is more powerful (Baker 2001: 62)	The one that we learn when the development of the first language has already started or the one that is used less (Tsokalidou 2012: 26; Baker 2001: 62)
Foreign language	
The one that we learn without being a part of our daily communication or of our wider environment (Mpella, 2007, as cited in Tsokalidou 2012: 27).	

Table 3 Definitions of Bilingualism

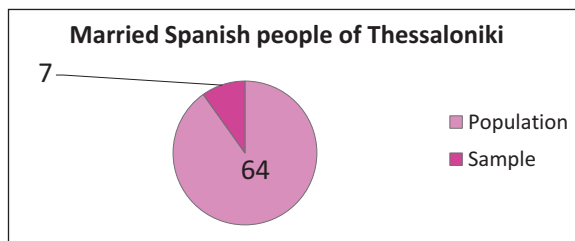
Definitions of Bilingualism	
Bloomfield (1933)	Speaking two or more languages at a “perfect” level; the bilingual person is like native speaker (as cited in Tsokalidou 2012: 20–21; Skourtou 2011: 79; Baker 2001: 50)
Weinreich (1953)	The alternate use of two languages by a single person (as cited in Skourtou 2011: 80)
Haugen (1956)	The person’s ability to produce well-formed meaningful utterances in two or more languages (as cited in Tsokalidou 2012: 21)
Diebold (1964)	Originally bilingual: each person who uses a second language, even with minimal adequacy (as cited in Baker 2001: 50)
Macnamara (1970)	The ability, even limited, in one of the four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing) in two or more languages (as cited in Tsokalidou 2012: 21)
Brutt-Griffler & Varghese (2004)	The intermediate continuous linguistic area, consisting of languages, but also a mixture of cultures and perspectives (as cited in Tsokalidou 2012: 22)

especially in Greece and, finally, the relations between the Greek and Spanish language, featuring their proximity (Table 3).

3 Methodological Context

The main and broad question of this research is if Spanish is maintained over the years – from one generation to another – in non-Spanish language environments. Thus, through this study we aim to indicate the tendency of maintenance or the shift

Chart 1 Sample of the research in comparison with the target population of the region



of the Spanish language towards Greek. To meet this aim, we examined the following questions which formed the basis of our research:

- Is the Spanish language maintained within the family in a Greek language environment?
- Do the relations with the country of origin (Spain) remain strong?
- At which level are the Spanish language skills of the children developed?
- Which are the fields of language use?
- Do the relations between the two countries and the two languages affect the maintenance of Spanish?
- What attitudes do parents have towards the Spanish language and its maintenance?
- What are the parents' attitudes toward bilingualism?
- What practices do parents use to reinforce and, therefore, maintain Spanish within the family?

To conduct our survey, we chose the qualitative method and, as a research tool, we used semi-structured interviews (Nils and Rime 2003: 173). The interviews that we conducted were recorded and then transcribed, so that we could analyze them. Regarding the sample, our survey included 7 Greek-Spanish families residing in the city of Thessaloniki (see Chart 1).

This number is considered satisfactory (nearly 11% of the married Spanish in the region), because according to the Hellenic Statistical Authority,¹ in the region of Central Macedonia, the population of Spanish residents in 2011 is only 155, of which 64 are married, 42 are women and 22 are men.

4 Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was conducted by using the data collected from the interviews. As a result, the data was grouped into various categories, using the common theme (thematic axis) Thus, the thematic points of our research are the following:

- A. Selection and use of Spanish – Fields of language use
- B. Children's language skills in Spanish

¹<http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/PAGE-cencus2011tables>

- C. Reinforcement practices of Spanish in the family
- D. Existence and maintenance of the relations with the country of origin and its culture
- E. Importance and value of Spanish
- F. Attitudes toward the relations between Greece and Spain
- G. Attitudes toward bilingualism

As a consequence, we created thematic categories for each axis based on the interview data in order to answer the questions of the research and meet its objectives. It is important to mention that the categories emerged from the data itself; they were not determined in advance by the author (Guardado 2002: 351). Similarly, the significant elements were classified allowing us to export general conclusions on the subject of our research.

5 Findings

Subsequently, the findings of the research are presented briefly according to the aforementioned thematic points. The extracts used to justify the results are translations of the same extracts of the interviews in Greek.

5.1 Selection and Use of Spanish: Fields of Language Use

5.1.1 Dominant Language of the Family

Most families (5 out of 7) choose Greek as main language of communication at home. Two families used Spanish as their main language when the children were younger. Then, one of them chose Greek as main language and the other one used both. Finally, one single family used both languages since the birth of their children until this date (see Charts 2 and 3).

Chart 2 Dominant language between family members. Before refers to the time when the children were toddlers

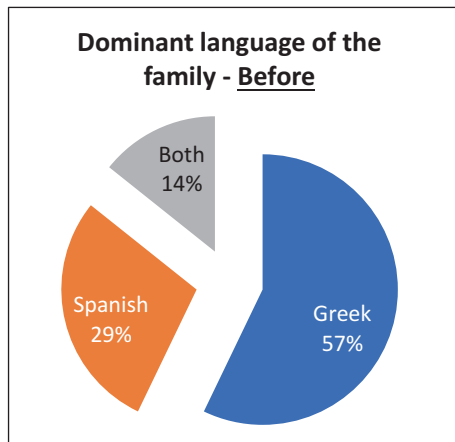


Chart 3 Dominant language between family members. Now refers to 2014, the time when the research was conducted

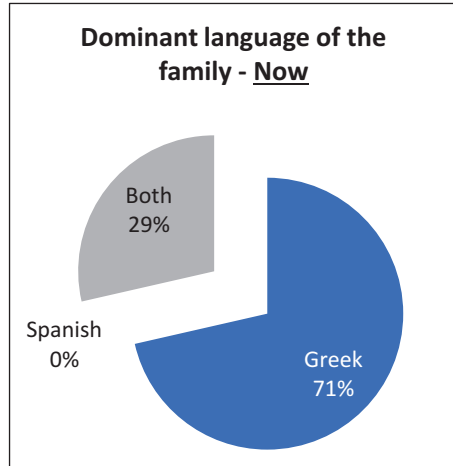
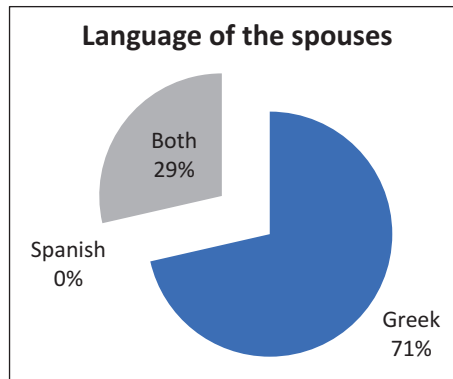


Chart 4 Language used between the couple of the mixed family



5.1.2 Language of the Spouses

The language chosen by the couple is Greek at the rate of 71% (5 of 7 families). The other two couples use both languages (Greek and Spanish) (see Chart 4).

5.1.3 Language Between Parents and Children

Most parents speak with their children in their native language until the children develop a sufficient level in each language (see Chart 5). Thus, as the children grow either they use both languages or, more often, they tend to use Greek (see Chart 6).

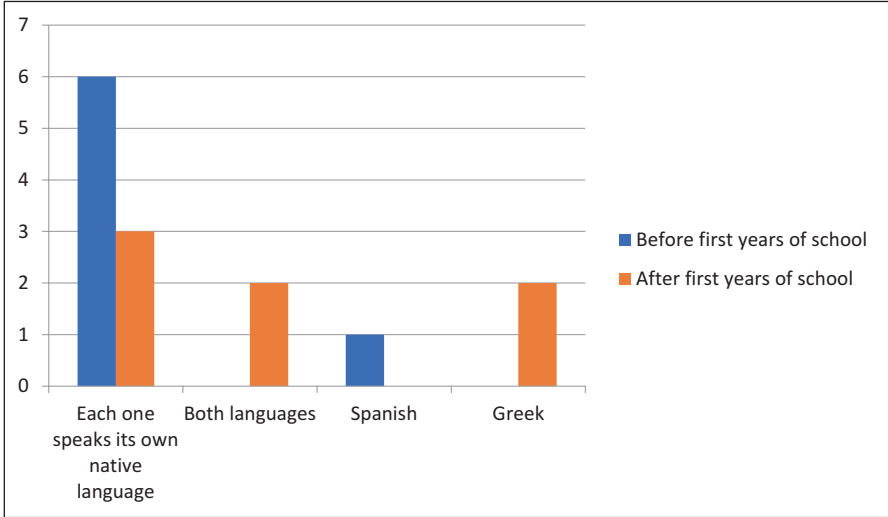


Chart 5 Language used by parents to communicate with their children. There is a distinction between language use before and after the first school years

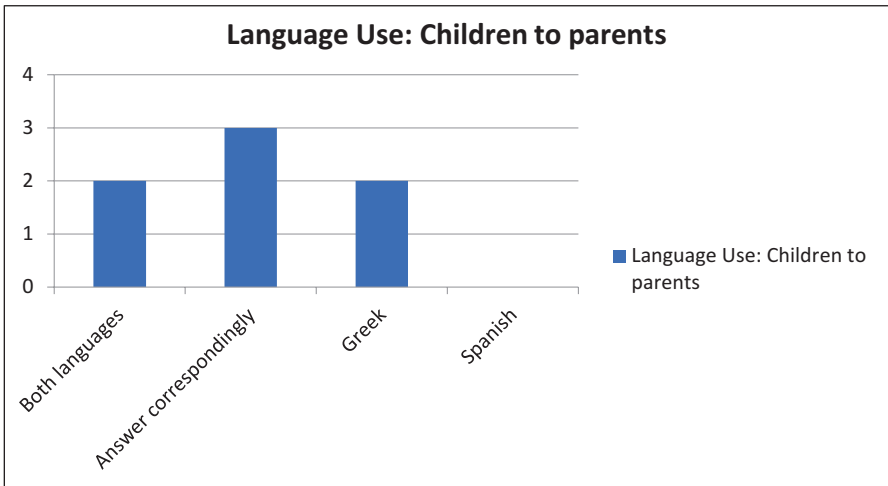


Chart 6 Language used by children to communicate with their parents

5.1.4 Language Among Children

In most cases, the choice of language depends on the country where the children are, so generally, they follow the language of the environment (see Chart 7).

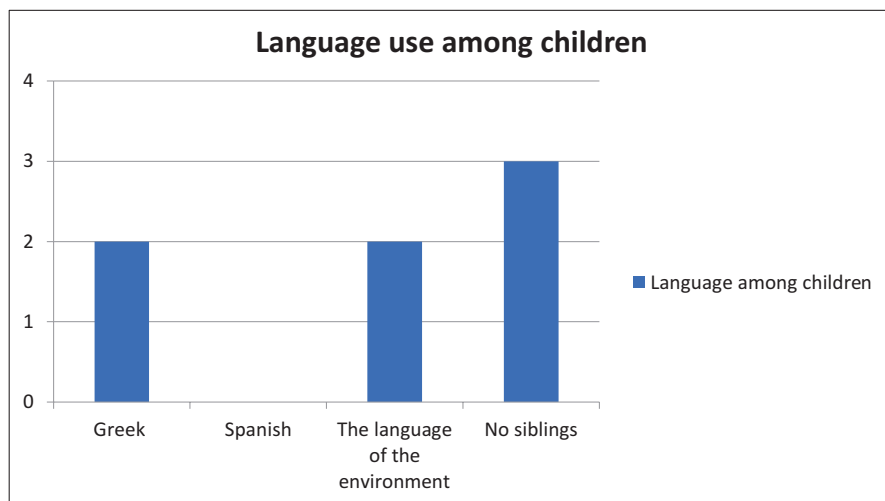


Chart 7 Language used by children to communicate among them

5.1.5 Other Fields of Use of Spanish

Spanish is often used when parents or children do not want to be understood by those around them, such as a mother says: “(...) *but when they did not want to be understood by others, they used Spanish and the same thing was also happening in Spain, they were speaking in Spanish and when they did not want to be understood, they spoke in Greek*”. In all families, the Spanish language is used at work, provided that it is a basic tool of the profession either of the parents or their children. In addition, Spanish is the language used with the family members and friends abroad, but also with the Spanish-speaking friends in Greece.

5.2 Language Skills of the Children in Spanish

According to parents, Greek is the most developed language by their children. However, the older children and adults in 3 out of 7 families develop Spanish at a high level. They use both languages almost at the same level, with a slight weakness in Spanish vocabulary. On the other hand, the younger children use Spanish at a sufficient level, but they are rather weak at writing (production and comprehension).

Below we give two examples of what parents said:

- “(...) *They have a normal development in grammar, that is to say they now use passive voice, subjunctive. I correct them when they speak, but there is a lack of vocabulary. (...) at this moment, they cannot discuss issues with the same ease as in Greek* “

- “(...) *She began with both languages, I think. (...) The truth is that the first words are common in both languages, mom, ‘baba’, papa. (...) Spanish is on an oral level, because I have not taught her to write in Spanish, Greek is on a better level, as it’s written and oral and certainly it is on a higher level in vocabulary*”

5.3 Reinforcement Practices of Spanish in the Family

Firstly, it is important to mention that most parents try to reinforce Spanish as long as their children are still in kindergarten or at the beginning of the primary school. Then, as their children acquire a satisfactory level in the language, “*they relax*”, as a mother told us. Nevertheless, the practices, which the parents used or still use in order to reinforce Spanish in the family, are various:

- *Visiting Spain so that the children practice Spanish in its natural context.*
- *Contact with family and friends living in Spain (or Greece) using various means of communication (phone, facebook, whatsapp, etc.)*
- *Insistence on the use of language:* All Spanish mothers stated that they, themselves, but also their spouses in two cases, spoke Spanish constantly with their children when they were little, so that they learn and develop the language naturally, as a mother tongue. “*(...) So, I use the Spanish language in a very natural way, as my mother used it with me*”
- *Reading books and fairy tales in Spanish*
- *Watching films (at home or at the cinema), television and theater are other practices that all parents use to reinforce the target language*
- *Spanish music and songs*
- *Spanish language courses:* Only 3 out of 7 families chose the language courses as a practice to reinforce Spanish, provided that they had this opportunity offered by the Greek-Spanish union, as one of the mothers said: “*then we started the union, we offered the courses, but the children already spoke Spanish.*”
- *Educational games in Spanish:* “*I had games with letters, with which children were learning words and their handwriting in Spanish, like puzzles. They had several things with a Spanish element*”
- *Groups of children of the Greek-Spanish families for the improvement of the language:* An interesting practice is the creation of a “baby group”, as they call it. The mothers of preschool and school age children gather, so that their children can meet and interact with each other, but, above all, the goal of the group is to practice Spanish.

5.4 Existence and Maintenance of the Relations with the Country of Origin (Spain) and Its Culture

All the participants of our research expressed their intention to maintain relations with Spain and also maintaining the Spanish element in Greece and in their families. To achieve this, they used several methods.

Firstly, in order to maintain bonds with their country, the main ways are the relations with Spanish-speaking friends and family (in Spain or in Greece), but also the trips to Spain. One mother told us that: *“the contact is not lost and thanks to the trips which they made when they were young, they are very attached to their cousins there and to the family in general, so they talk with them every day or very often”*. Regarding the relations with Spanish-speaking friends, it is remarkable that the situation was a little more complicated because over the years it was quite difficult for the participants to keep in touch with their friends in Spain. For example, this is what another mother stated: *“I cannot say that I’ve kept a lot of contacts, especially, because they were lost before. When I arrived because, I think, there was no internet, the phones (the phone calls) were expensive, so the only thing left was to write a letter by hand. And gradually, because of the work, because of the distance, I don’t know, we lost contact since the beginning”*. However, there are many participants who still have friends in Spain, which helps them maintain bonds with their country: *“Yes, I keep a friendship; with my best friend, we are friends 45 years and with my colleagues from the Ministry I still maintain friendships, so this is a door that is not closed and it will never be shut (...)”*.

Secondly, concerning the maintenance of the Spanish presence in Greece, the Spanish community of Thessaloniki has weakened. During the 1990s and until 2007, it was more organized. As a participant says: *“We did a lot of things. Even our own children had attended Spanish lessons, we continued our celebrations, we met regularly, we had a big library, with books mainly in Spanish, some in Greek, a library to lend books, there was, therefore, a very lively existence of the Spanish element (...). A dynamic community with our food, our dances, we had dance classes, seminars, with the language, the culture, with exhibitions, conferences, there was too much – too much work, and we had very good results.”*

Nowadays, there there has been an attempt to revive the Spanish element in the city, thanks to the cooperation of 2–3 community clubs. However, participation is not very large, because, as the younger participants of our study (4 out of 7 families) told us, they are not interested in clubs and the Spanish community, for various reasons, although they have contacts with Spanish-speaking people in Thessaloniki: *“I know that there is a club, at the beginning I went there, it didn’t happen to go again and I don’t have many contacts (...) I have a good relationship with the Spanish who are here, but I have no relationship with the Spanish community in Thessaloniki”*.

5.5 Importance and Value of Spanish

This thematic axis is divided into three categories: (1). Attitudes toward the *maintenance* of the Spanish language, (2). Attitudes toward *the Spanish language*, (3). Attitudes toward the Spanish language *in the Greek environment*.

5.5.1 Attitudes Toward the Maintenance of Spanish

The maintenance of Spanish is the main objective for the participants. It is considered as something positive, because it offers them a lot: *“certainly, I think that having a second language in home is a treasure»*, as something natural, given that it is their native language: *“it seems very normal, very familiar“*, but at the same time, as something essential for the family: *“(…) it was a family need”, “(…) the child must learn the language of the grandparents. I think that it is needed”*. That is why a number of participants (2 mothers) say they want to continue the maintenance of the language to future generations.

5.5.2 Attitudes Toward Spanish

For the Spanish participants of our research, Spanish is *“their own language”*, as almost all of them told us, indicating the emotional value that the language has for them. Spanish is considered to be *a part of themselves, the main way of expression* and also *what unites them with their country*: *“These are my roots and I want to keep these roots”, “For me, it is something given, it is my language, the end (….) I can express myself much better in Spanish, something that satisfies me a lot “*.

Moreover, according to participants, Spanish has a utilitarian value because it is a primary *communication tool globally*, since it is one of the most spoken languages in the world: *“I can communicate with millions of people, about 420, who officially speak Spanish, so it’s a very good tool “*. Furthermore, they think that Spanish is useful as a *fundamental professional tool*: *“Currently in Greece, for several years, it helps me to work, so, again, if we take a look at the economic aspect, it is a great tool for me and my family “*.

5.5.3 Attitudes Toward Spanish in Greece

Concerning the value, the position and the vision of the Spanish language and culture in Greece, according to our participants, two completely different views were noticed. On one hand, the majority (5 out of 7 families) believes that the Spanish language and culture and in general Spain, as a country, are treated in a very positive way by Greek people: *“It is a very endearing language. When the Greeks hear Spanish, they rejoice, because for them it is like Italian. Perhaps because they are considered Mediterranean people, and it’s a little closer. Spanish is nice for them”*. On the other hand, the other part of the sample (3 families out of 7) thinks that it is an uninteresting language, without any utility for the Greeks, which is confirmed by the position of Spanish in Greek schools, where it is almost non-existent: *“The Spanish language in Greece has no great value, at first it does not exist in schools, although there were attempts, they are not fundamental”*.

5.6 *Attitudes Toward the Relations Between Greece and Spain*

In this thematic axis, we can distinguish two categories: (1). Attitudes concerning the similarities between cultures and languages of both countries, (2). Relations between the two countries (language-culture similarities) as a factor of language maintenance.

5.6.1 **Attitudes Concerning the Similarities Between Cultures and Languages of Both Countries**

Almost all participants admitted that there are similarities between the people, cultures and languages of the two countries (Spain and Greece): *“We should not forget that in Spain the Greeks were present for several years, we have many monuments there. We are therefore bound, art and many Greek authors deal with Spain (...), so we have many common elements that bring us together. Not only the language”, “I think we have the same approach (regarding the languages) in principle. About grammatical tenses, and for many things, pronunciation is the same and this helps a lot”, “As we’re both people of Mediterranean, we have much in common, for everything, in humor, in our relationships with friends, relations with family, the perception of various things. I think that we have many things in common”.*

However, Greece and Spain are two different countries, so differences also exist, as a Greek participant said: *“There is no connection between Greece and Spain as people (...) only the marriage of Sophie with the king (...) that is to say, in fact, that even if we are very close, this relationship is not developed (...) While the relationship with other people who are here have been developed.. with the Italians and Germans one can say”.*

5.6.2 **The Relations Between the Two Countries (Language-Culture Similarities) as a Factor of Language Maintenance**

The opinions of our sample for this category are divided into two. On the one hand, the majority of our participants (4 out of 7 families – 57%) believe that the similarities between the two countries are a factor which does not influence the maintenance of Spanish and, in some cases, it is considered a negative element: *“I do not know if this (the relations) helped, but if I lived in Germany for example, I think that I would speak Spanish with my child. It did not play a role”, “For my children, I can say that it was an obstacle (...) Yes, because they are very similar to the point that you do not understand what you say”.* On the other hand, there are two participants who believe that the relations between the two countries can play a role in the maintenance of the language, as it can make them feel comfortable and the language can be reinforced: *“This is to say that a Greek who goes to Spain feels very comfortable and a Spanish in Greece feels very familiar (...) Of course – of course, it helps (...) I believe that these similarities play a role”.*

5.7 Attitudes Toward Bilingualism

The participants of the research are positive toward bilingualism. When they think of their own case of bilingualism and their children's, the provoked feelings are joy, pleasure and contentment. In particular, they admit that this is a very important privilege, which can offer only advantages: *"whatever the language, even if you think it is the most useless language in the world, it will always offer you something, it will open you a "door", I think that language is everything"*.

Regarding the advantages of bilingualism that our participants noted, it is possible to divide them into four subcategories. First, there are the cognitive benefits, which concern the knowledge of the children and their way of learning either a foreign language or in general, which is easier for bilingual children, as their parents stated: *"I do not know if my children were born very smart or the fact that they are bilingual has helped them to have a different perception, since they do not struggle a lot to understand the courses and do their homework for school", "privileged children. Because I think their brain works differently after (...) Firstly, the third language comes too easily to them, and when you have such an ease with languages, you are at least privileged"*.

Further, parents find that bilingualism is an asset for their children, since it offers them an additional and significant feature for their professional profile without effort. At the same time, bilingualism can also be an essential tool to find a job, to acquire better remuneration and, therefore, a better standard of living: *"Today, foreign languages play a very important role. They (the children) have an extra language in their CVs, without schools, without suffering, without exercises"*.

Moreover, there are the cultural benefits. According to parents, bilingualism offers the knowledge of another language, but also the knowledge of a different culture, of a different mentality, which expands minds and provides skills to communicate with more people around the world: *"On the other hand, it opens the horizons of people. Because via Spanish, they know a culture », «(...) They can communicate with 500 million people, I think that this is a very important heritage"*.

Finally, it is important to note that bilingualism contributes to the development of character and broadens the mind. Precisely, it is believed that it makes the person able to confront reality in a different way: *"She/he learns two ways of thinking, two modes of behavior, two modes of confronting life, things (...) this allows living, experiencing two cultures and it can perhaps help to be more open in accepting what is different"*.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has shown that parents are positive about bilingualism, something that is in line with the research findings of (a) Lutz (2008: 37, 58) and of Pease-Alvarez (1993: 16), who agree that bilingualism is considered as ideal and as something positive by parents, and (b) Guardado (2002: 360) who highlights the

economic benefits of bilingualism. Thus, parents defend the maintenance of Spanish, considering it natural and essential for their families (Guardado (2002: 360).

Therefore, parents apply various practices so as to promote bilingualism in their family. These practices do not differ a lot from the strategies that have already been mentioned in the survey of Bayley et al. (1996: 389, 405) such as the use of the Spanish language in family interactions and the insistence of parents that this is carried out, the close links with monolingual Spanish-speaking relatives and the visits to the country of origin. In addition to these, in our study parents point out strongly the use of various tools, like Spanish books and fairy tales, Spanish songs, games and movies, especially with the preschool and school age children, but also they mention that taking some Spanish language courses is beneficial for their children.

Furthermore, the Spanish language is considered by our participants as part of their identity and as an important means of expression and communication, which is consistent with the results of the research of Sanchez-Castro and Gil (2009: 44), while it also highlights the historical significance and value of the language for people who leave their country of origin.

Regarding the relations between the two countries, Spain and Greece and how they contribute to the language maintenance, it is evident from the findings that the majority of participants support the existence of similarities between the cultural and linguistic elements of those two countries. However, considering whether these similarities promote the maintenance of Spanish within the family, most participants believe that there is no influence. Moreover, some state that linguistic and cultural similarities may affect language maintenance negatively, confirming Clyne's view (1991, as cited by Sella-Mazi 2001: 97), according to which language shift is more frequent on similar languages. On the other hand, a small proportion (28.5%) of our sample supports the view that the similarities work as a positive factor, stating that the effect takes place subconsciously. In general, these aspects confirm what it is mentioned by Conklin & Lourie (1983, as cited by Sella-Mazi 2001: 97) according to which the degree of similarity of the two languages affects language maintenance or shift.

As far as our study is considered as a whole, at the moment that the research was conducted (2014), a partial maintenance of the Spanish language is observed, especially in families having older children. Nevertheless, we observe an overall tendency of language shift toward the Greek language, since practices and efforts aiming at reinforcing Spanish get weaker over the years, despite the general willingness of parents to support and maintain the target language.

To achieve the desired result, it is suggested that parents do not abandon the efforts and practices to reinforce Spanish in the family when they notice that the children develop, according to them, a basic competence in the target language. A basic level is not a criterion that a language will be maintained, nor evidence that the children will continue to use it as well or even better. Another proposal to contribute to the objective is the maintenance of contacts with the Spanish community in the place of residence, in order to cultivate a love for the Spanish language and culture in the children. At the same time, through contacts and relations with Spanish-speaking people, the language acquires a utilitarian value. Consequently, from an

early age, children notice that Spanish is a tool to communicate and build relationships with other children who have the same country of origin and, as a result, the desire to learn and preserve this language is cultivated.

Finally, through our research, several new questions have emerged concerning the maintenance of Spanish and it would be good to study them in the future. Below we are presenting some suggestions for further research on this subject:

- Research of similar issues, but by using a combination of methodological tools (interviews and observation), mainly for the study of language skills of children and parents in Spanish and Greek, in order to examine precisely and in depth whether the language is maintained and to what extent.
- Research of similar issues, but with a sample from another region of Greece or abroad, for example Athens, or Cyprus or the Balkans in order to compare results.
- Research on the attitudes of the second-generation Spanish people towards language maintenance.
- Following up research on the maintenance of the Spanish language in the Greek-Spanish community of Thessaloniki a few years in order to observe language maintenance in the future generations and to compare results.
- Research on the preservation of the Spanish element in Greece by the Spanish consulate.

By studying these questions, we aim at continuing our research and also understanding and exploring the field of language maintenance more and in depth. As a result, we hope to contribute to the dissemination of multilingualism at a national and a global level.

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