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On: 20 February 2013, At: 08:09

Publisher: Routledge

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Language and Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rlae20>

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Version of record first published: 20 Apr 2012.

To cite this article: Mila Schwartz (2013): Immigrant parents' and teachers' views on bilingual preschool language policy, *Language and Education*, 27:1, 22-43

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2012.673626>

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Immigrant parents' and teachers' views on bilingual preschool language policy

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(Received 30 October 2011; final version received 26 February 2012)

It has been found that parents, searching for external control of a supporting sociolinguistic environment for L1 and L2 development, can plan several relevant strategies and implement them as a part of their family language policy. The choice of bilingual education serves as an important link in the practical realization of family language ideology. This paper aims to examine language policy and models in bilingual preschools from immigrant parents' and bilingual teachers' perspectives. The focus was on the following topics: (1) the parents' views on the language policy of the bilingual preschool education, (2) the teachers' reflections on their language policy and (3) the negotiation between parents' and teachers' views on bilingual preschool language policy. It was important to address both parents' and teachers' opinions in order to obtain a deeper understanding of parent–teacher interactions and negotiations of their views. The study was conducted in two bilingual Russian-Hebrew speaking preschools in Israel. I applied methodological triangulation with a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The study revealed that questions regarding input in each language, ratio between L1 and L2, and changes of this ratio in different age groups are central concerns for both the pedagogical staff and parents.

Keywords: bilingual education; family language ideology; teachers' language policy; language ratio; 'First Language First' approach

Introduction

This paper aims to examine the ways in which bilingual preschool policy-makers (immigrant and host country teachers) reflect on their language policy on the one hand, and how immigrant parents who chose bilingual preschool education view this policy on the other hand. The motivation for this paper has risen from three phenomena: (1) the growing interest of policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in young second-generation immigrants and their social, linguistic and cognitive development in light of the State and Family Language Policy model of Spolsky (2004); (2) the unique role of language policy of educational settings and family language policy in these children's development; and (3) the increasing awareness of the necessity to examine early bilingual development within specific ethnolinguistic and immigrant contexts.

Family language policy with regard to bilingual education

Although the concept of family language policy has been defined only recently, existing research surveys reveal that a focus on family language ideology, practice and management

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as components of family language policy arouses keen interest worldwide (King and Fogle 2006; Spolsky 2007; Schwartz 2010). In distinguishing these three components, Spolsky (2004, 5) notes:

... language practices – the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire; its language beliefs or ideology – the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning or management.

Using this model at the family level enables us to integrate the separate components within a structural, flexible and expandable framework.

It has been found that parents, searching for external control of a supporting sociolinguistic environment for L1 and L2 development, can plan several relevant strategies and implement them as a part of their family language policy. The choice of bilingual education serves as an important link in the practical realization of family language ideology. There is a clear consensus about the critical role of early education in the maintenance and intergenerational transmission of minority languages (Fishman 1991; Wong Fillmore 1991; Baker 2001; Spolsky 2007). Research in this domain has focused on the characteristics of parents who choose bilingual education for their children and factors favoring this choice (King and Fogle 2006; Schwartz et al. 2010). In addition, the focus has also been on how immigrant parents relate to bilingual education. In the present study, I examined immigrant parents' views and opinions on the integration of L1 and L2 within bilingual preschools as a part of their language ideology.

Immigrant parents' views on language policy within bilingual education

Recent studies have focused on immigrant parents' attitudes toward bilingual education in different minority language communities in the United States and examined them by means of surveys (Lee 1999; Amaral 2001; Sheffer 2003; Lao 2004). For example, this topic was in the center of Lao's study (2004) focusing on Chinese-dominant and English-dominant parents who enrolled their children in a Chinese-English bilingual elementary school. Although the majority of parents believed that bilingual education facilitates children's language development in both the L1 and the L2, many of them did not view this education as a vehicle for achieving a high level of proficiency in English as an L2. Thus, there was discrepancy between support of underlying principles of bilingual education and feeling that L2 (English) development will be better and faster in an all-L2 English classroom. Another interesting finding was that the Chinese-dominant parents did not see importance in the continuation of this type of education beyond the elementary level, while the English-dominant parents preferred this school.

In addition, research has shown that often immigrant parents do not understand in depth the model of the target bilingual educational setting and have divergent views on its objectives. Thus, in a study of Spanish-speaking parents whose children were enrolled in a bilingual kindergarten class in the United States, Sheffer (2003) found a striking lack of understanding of the language model applied in the class and the existing ratio between L1 and L2. Sheffer (2003) concluded that this result might be attributed to the low level of parental involvement in the kindergarten and the lack of communication between parents, administrators and classroom teachers. Along the same lines, in a large-scale survey carried out by Lee (1999), 30% of Spanish-English speaking parents whose children were enrolled in bilingual education classes thought that their objective was to develop English skills only.

In addition, in Lemberger's (1997) study, bilingual teachers noted that what the parents do not realize is that in wanting their children to learn English and North American ways, children may gradually lose their native language, leaving parents unable to communicate with them.

Note, however, that although the parents' surveys presented earlier in the paper might shed light on some tendencies in parents' perceptions of language and education within an early bilingual setting, this research tool cannot provide an in-depth, qualitative insight into the family language ideology and understanding of the model of language development within a bilingual setting. In this context, the present study applied methodological triangulation in its research by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. More specifically, the data obtained from the survey form the background for the deeper understanding of parents' views on language policy and the model of bilingual preschools collected by semi-structured interviews.

In addition, in the previous studies, the parents' understanding of bilingual education and its language policy was examined separately from the teachers' views. This research stressed that addressing both the parents' and the teachers' opinion is critical in order to understand the effect of language policy in an educational setting on a child's bilingual development during the preschool stage.

Teachers' reflections on language policy and the model of bilingual education

Reflection is an important part of the professional behavior of teachers and an essential condition for their professional development and identification. Using reflection allows for teachers' construction and reconstruction of professional experience, identifying problems and obstacles and finding their solution, and a critical approach to the teachers' own pedagogical ideology and practice (see, for review, Hatton and Smith 1995; Luttenberg and Bergen 2008). The reflections might enable teachers to articulate their implicit personal theories of teaching, the conceptual frameworks by which they problematize and make sense of their practice.

The language policy adopted by the educational system is without a doubt one of the most powerful forces in language model construction and in its practical implementation in the bilingual curriculum. At the same time, there is growing data on the inconsistency between language policy and its implementation and realization results within two-way programs in the United States (Lee 2007; De Palma 2010). For example, Lee (2007) provided a critical approach to examining language policy and its realization in two-way immersion kindergartens. The main principle of the language policy of this Korean-English kindergarten was 'stick to one language' during target language time, which was mandated by the district. This principle was combined with the usage of the minority language during most instructional time, by the 70:30 language distribution policy: Korean was used during 70% of class time and English was employed during the remaining 30% of the time. By means of these two principles, competence in the minority language by the English-dominant minority and the majority-language-speaking children has been expected to be provided. However, Lee (2007) found that the implementation of this policy of sticking to Korean without permitting code-switching was very challenging for the children and for the teacher herself, and resulted in many miscommunications and children's tendency to 'shut down' their responses. Thus, it was evident that the teacher is reluctant to reconsider her language policy, and the model in the context of this specific classroom where many children did not speak Korean at home.

Relatively little research has been conducted to date on bilingual education teachers' reflection on their language policy and the model of bilingual education as a part of their bilingual pedagogy (Lemberger 1997; Conteh 2007; Amara et al. 2009; De Palma 2010; Schwartz, Mor-Sommerfeld, and Leikin 2010). The existing findings showed that bilingual teachers faced daily dilemmas on how to negotiate between two languages. Lemberger (1997) found that in the bilingual teachers' view two contemporary processes, i.e. maintenance of L1 and the need to ensure L2 progress, were challenging and difficult to manage. One teacher even expressed inconsistency in wanting both to maintain the native language while at the same time giving her first- and second-grade students the maximum English input to succeed academically. However, as Lemberger (1997) highlighted, awareness of the L2 transitional model's consequences for L1 did not cause a rethinking of the existing language ratio or curriculum changes.

The research also shows that in solving these dilemmas, the teachers relied mostly on their own language ideology and experience (Lemberger 1997), since they had never been given any special courses on bilingual instruction. Thus, De Palma (2010), in her in-depth qualitative study, showed a continuous struggle of the two-way model kindergarten teacher trying to teach Spanish as a 'Power Language' within and beyond academic spaces. De Palma (2010) showed how the teacher became a minority language 'advocate' and made a tremendous effort to keep an equal ratio between English and Spanish against the directions of school authorities. Her conviction that natural conversation is critical to language acquisition in Spanish as a minority language was aimed at enhancing the status of this language. It also appeared that the teacher's language ideology was strongly related to complex emotional processes and personal experience.

The present study, therefore, aimed to extend our understanding of how teachers rationalize their language policy and approach bilingual preschool development. The teachers' reflections will be presented in light of the parents' concerns on language ratio in the target preschools.

Models of preschool bilingual education

In addressing preschool bilingual education, our focus will be on the dual language program. The dual language program as a model of bilingual education is characterized by a 'language as a resource' orientation that sees languages other than a majority language of society (e.g. English in the United States, French in France) as resources to be developed (Ruiz 1984), while the monolingual program is aimed solely at transferring the minority language children from their home language to the majority language or at educating them only in the majority language.

Freeman (2007) described three types of dual language program. The first type is the two-way program in the case of the United States for English speakers and speakers of another language (e.g. Spanish). The second type is the language immersion program that exclusively targets speakers of the dominant language in society (e.g. English speakers in the United States and Canada) and provides a second language for at least 50% of the curriculum. The last type is the one-way developmental bilingual program with the target children coming only from language-minority homes, as in the case of our study. In the target bilingual program, the Russian-speaking children began their acquisition of Hebrew (L2) from around age three, within an additive context. This context provides a bilingual *additive* environment (Lambert 1975) supporting the maintenance of the L1 as the children acquire the majority language, encouraging a balanced bilingual development. At the same time, the monolingual program, which aims only to transfer the minority language children

from their home language to the majority language or to educate them only in the majority language, provides a *subtractive* bilingual context (Lambert 1975).

The target bilingual program applies a '*First Language First*' model of preschool bilingual education, which means that the sequential onset of L2 (Hebrew) begins as the basic linguistic structures and the lexicon in L1 Russian are acquired. This model was examined in this study. Note that in this study, we use the term 'preschool' as a form of early childhood education for children, which serves as a transition from their homes to the commencement of a more formal schooling. In Israel, the term 'preschool' serves as a part of the educational system, usually between the ages of three and six.

The present study

Russian-Hebrew speaking immigrants in Israel and community language policy

The study's population consists of parents, and in part teachers, who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union during the last 20 years. This immigrant community comprises the largest subcultural community in Israel, comprising approximately 20% of the total Jewish population in the country. It is characterized by high educational levels and a well-organized Russian-speaking sociocultural milieu, including consumption markets, educational and cultural institutions, local party branches, newspapers, magazines and television (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). In addition, the declaration of Russian-speaking immigrants' original cultural identity underlies one of the stated aims of language policy at the community level: the preservation of a cultural heritage and its language among the second generation. To realize this, Russian-speaking immigrant parents conduct external and internal language strategies with regard to the children's preschool bilingual development. In this context, recent research showed that these active parents believed in the power of the home language environment, which could provide quantity and quality of language input for the second generation (Kopeliovich 2006). In addition, these parents applied external language management by the support of networks establishing preschool Russian-Hebrew education in the early 1990s, which will be presented later in the paper. This study focuses on investigating the language model used in this network from parents' and teachers' perspectives.

Preschool bilingual education

In Israel, an organization of Russian immigrant teachers was established in 1992 with the aim of offering programs outside the school setting. This organization operates over 25 bilingual preschools and has activities in 90 schools and cultural institutions throughout the country. The main aim of the bilingual preschools' language policy is for children to achieve a high level of linguistic competence in the heritage language (Russian) and in the majority language of the host country (Hebrew). This language policy is in line with language policy at the community level. Thus, the main acculturation strategy of this community is integration, combining maintenance of the original culture and adaptation to the host culture (Horenczyk and Ben-Shalom 2006).

Although these bilingual preschools are private institutions, they function under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (there are several educational sectors in Israel, most of them supervised by the Ministry of Education). Teachers in the Russian-Hebrew preschools use the same curriculum as in the Hebrew monolingual kindergarten, adapted to their needs. As in mainstream kindergartens, the everyday curriculum typically includes topic discussions (e.g. religious festivals, seasons and weather, family), read-aloud sessions

(questions about a story, predictions, discussions, vocabulary enrichment and retelling), and music, rhythm and art sessions. The supervision of the Ministry of Education addresses only the program in Hebrew, which is conducted by a native Hebrew-speaking teacher, who is responsible for the Hebrew language instructions from age three and provides the language input during a part of the daily classroom time. At age five, the children move on to compulsory municipal kindergartens. Note that the Ministry of Education does not supervise the instructional program in Russian, which is planned and governed by the pedagogical staff of the network.

This study was conducted in two bilingual preschools, ‘*Radost*’ (‘happiness’) and ‘*Solnushko*’ (‘sun’),¹ which were chosen due to their geographic location in northern Israel. Both preschools were established in adjacent neighborhoods around 10 years ago, have a similar language policy and the target model of bilingual education. It should also be emphasized that, in these frameworks, mostly second-generation children (aged 1–5 years), who, in most cases, are from homes of middle socioeconomic status in which both parents emigrated from the former Soviet Union, are enrolled.

With this theoretical and sociocultural context, the following research questions were examined:

1. How do the immigrant parents view language policy and the model of bilingual preschools in which their children are enrolled?
2. How do the teachers explain their language policy and in particular the ‘*First Language First*’ approach toward bilingual development? The ‘*First Language First*’ approach (cf. one language first strategy in Grosjean 2010) is a model of sequential bilingual development, which was addressed in the study as a practical implication of the language policy adopted by the pedagogical staff of the target bilingual preschools.
3. How do teachers and parents negotiate challenges of the existing language model?

Method

Research design

This study presents a part of a large-scale research project focusing on second-generation Russian-Hebrew speaking immigrants in Israel and their preschool bilingual development and education. The paper presents the results of two stages of the study: the quantitative stage used questionnaires with parents, and the qualitative stage used in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents and the pedagogical staff. The importance of in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents cannot be overemphasized because they provide a sensitive method for understanding the processes taking place within the family (Okita 2002). Thus, the qualitative part of this study provided parents’ views on the language ratio in the target bilingual preschools and their opinion on the existing language model of these preschools. In addition, this part focused on how teachers reflect on their language policy and model.

Participants

Parents

The research population that participated in the questionnaire included immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Israel, i.e. the parents of Israeli-born children aged from two to five years old enrolled in the target network of bilingual kindergartens. The survey sample

Table 1. Parents' biosocial characteristics.

Family	Name	Age	Time in Israel (in years)	Occupation
1	Maya	31	11	Elementary school teacher
	Josef	39	20	Engineer
2	Oksana	30	15	Practical Engineer
3	Faina	30	19	Chemist
	Michael	31		Engineer
4	Elina	40	19	Nurse
	Arcady	41	21	Programmer

Note: The names of all parents and teachers have been changed to ensure anonymity.

comprised 260 adults, 166 families (the mean age was 34.2, $SD = 6.0$) with relatively high levels of education (M [in years] = 15.31, $SD = 2.4$). The parents' length of residence in Israel was relatively long (M [in years] = 13.22, $SD = 4.8$), and their residence was in the north of Israel.

All participants were minority language parents, whose first language and that of their children was Russian. Russian was also the dominant language of communication between family members, including the child. In all families, both parents were bilingual, and they reported relatively high language competence in Russian and Hebrew.

To select our participants for the interviews, a sequential explanatory mixed methods design with participant selection was employed (see Clark and Creswell 2008). Constructed on the information provided by the parents in the surveys of the first quantitative stage of the project, a small-scale sample of four families (seven parents) was randomly selected and met the following criteria: (1) intact families at a similar stage in the family life cycle, namely families with preschool-age five-year-old children who have been enrolled in the target two preschools for at least two years and at the moment of the study were at the beginning of the school year in the Hebrew (L2)-speaking kindergarten; and (2) bilingual (Russian and Hebrew) parents who had similar levels of education and lengths of residence in Israel. To study the parents' views on language policy and model in the target preschools, it was important to select families with children who experienced these preschools from at least age three (the age of supposed onset of instruction in L2) and up to age five (the last age group before transition to the Hebrew-speaking monolingual kindergarten).

Five parents arrived in Israel in their early twenties, and the other two parents belonged to 1.5 generation (1.5G), in that they immigrated to the host country prior to or during their early teens (Benesh 2008) at the start of the current influx of immigration from the host country (see Table 1). All participants obtained academic education in Israel and belonged to the Israeli middle class. Note also that all parents expressed willingness to cooperate with the author and be interviewed.

Pedagogical staff

Overall, six interviews were conducted by the author with the three teachers (one immigrant teacher and two host country teachers), two principals of two bilingual preschools (two former immigrant teachers and founders of these settings) and a host country general manager of the network of bilingual preschools and educational centers. Although the principals and teachers had no professional training in bilingual teaching, they reported active participation in different workshops and advanced professional meetings aiming to present

Table 2. Preschool teachers and principals: background data (personal and professional experience).

Name/position	Age/first language	Educational experience in the country of origin	Overall professional seniority (in years)	Professional seniority in the bilingual preschool (in years)
Olga, preschool minority language, principal	47, Russian	Teachers college, music teacher, philological faculty and pedagogical institute	25	7
Elena, preschool minority language, principal	52, Russian	Teachers college and certificate as elementary school teacher	30	9
Aviva, preschool majority language teacher	49, Hebrew	Teachers college, certificate as a preschool teacher and first-grade teacher	4	4
Orly, preschool majority language teacher	54, Hebrew	Teachers college, certificate as a preschool teacher and first-grade teacher	33	7
Olga, preschool minority language teacher	50, Russian	Teachers college	17	8

current theories on bilingual development and education and theoretically-based effective language strategies of bilingual pedagogy (e.g. Cummins's Interdependent Hypothesis – Cummins 2000). In addition, it is important to note that the pedagogical conception of this network is based on Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory (1978), with implications of the main principles such as the zone of proximal development, play as a sociocultural activity, scaffolding in adult–child interaction and peer learning.

Note that because both preschools' principals were immigrant teachers, we addressed them as principals and teachers. The background biosocial data of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Tools

Self-administered questionnaire

The instrument used in this research was a part of a self-administered questionnaire for parents (Moin, Schwartz, and Leikin 2007). In this part, the focus was on parental representations about the language model in the preschool, which was examined by assessing the ratio between the heritage and host languages in the preschool.

The representations concerning the ratio between L1 (Russian) and L2 (Hebrew) in the preschool were characterized by the following variables: (1) importance of the ratio, (2) desired (due) ratio in the different age groups, (3) actual ratio and (4) correspondence between the desired and the actual ratio. The importance of the language ratio was measured by one item ('For me, the balance between Russian and Hebrew in the preschool is not important') on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 – 'Completely agree' to 5 – 'Completely disagree'. The desired ratio was measured by the question: 'What should be the relationship between Russian and Hebrew in the preschool at different ages?' Respondents were asked to answer the question with regard to the three age groups (2–3, 3–4 and

4–5 years). A five-point scale was used to assess the desired ratio: 1 – ‘Hebrew only’, 2 – ‘Mainly Hebrew’, 3 – ‘Hebrew and Russian to an equal degree’, 4 – ‘Mainly Russian’ and 5 – ‘Russian only’.

Parents’ estimation of the actual ratio between L1 and L2 in the preschool was measured by the question: ‘What is the correlation between the Russian and Hebrew language in your child’s group?’, with the same five-point scale: 1 – ‘Hebrew only’, 2 – ‘Mainly Hebrew’, 3 – ‘Hebrew and Russian to an equal degree’, 4 – ‘Mainly Russian’ and 5 – ‘Russian only’.

The correspondence between the desired and the actual ratio was calculated by means of correlational analysis. In addition, in order to study parents’ reliance on the pedagogical staff concerning the ratio between the target languages, respondents were asked to rate the extent of their agreement with the statement: ‘I fully rely on the preschool’s pedagogical personnel regarding the actual ratio between the use of Russian and Hebrew in the preschool’ on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 5 – ‘Completely agree’ to 1 – ‘Completely disagree with the ratio between the Russian and Hebrew used in the preschool’.

Interviews with the parents

Four semi-structured interviews were conducted in Russian in the participants’ homes at both parents’ convenience. Each interview lasted around 60 minutes. The participants gave their consent for the interviews to be tape-recorded, enabling the interviewer to focus on the conversation without the need for note-taking. In addition to background questions and questions related to the history of the child’s language development and acquisition, and questions related to family language practice and management, the participants were asked to respond to the following questions that were under the scope of this study: (1) What is your opinion concerning the ratio between Russian L1 and Hebrew L2 in different age groups in the preschool in which your child has been enrolled? (2) In your opinion, what is an optimal ratio in these age groups? (3) How can you describe the language policy in the preschool? (4) Did you discuss with teachers their language policy and your child’s language development? (5) Do you think that there need to be changes in the existing language policy and what are these changes?

Interviews with the pedagogical staff

The semi-structured interviews took place in the preschools at a time convenient for the participants in the form of free conversations focusing on the interviewees’ reflections on their bilingual pedagogical experience, perceptions and language policies relevant to their bilingual preschools. In addition, the teachers were asked about their interaction with parents and, in particular, parents’ involvement in the preschools’ language policy. The interview with the general manager of the network was carried out in his office and addressed similar topics to the interviews with the teachers. Each interview lasted about 90 minutes and was tape-recorded with the interviewees’ consent, in some cases allowing the interview to develop into a conversation. The languages of the interviews were Russian and Hebrew.

Interviews’ analysis

The interviews with the parents and the teachers were transcribed, coded and analyzed thematically using the standard procedures for analysis of qualitative data: placing labels

on themes and concepts that emerged from the data, open coding; building connections between categories to form larger, core categories, axial coding (Bogdan and Biklen 1992).

We used the methodological tool of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The primary focus of CDA is on social problems and it aims to take into account contextual factors, especially extra-linguistic factors such as pedagogy, culture and society. Since the notion of context is broad in CDA, it allows us to employ an interdisciplinary procedure by referring to the sociocultural and language policy contexts of the target bilingual preschools (Titscher et al. 2000).

The analysis was based on the main specific characteristics of CDA, such as the descriptive, interpretative and explanatory nature of the analysis. With regard to the interviews with the parents, we will analyze the following content categories, extracted from parents' interviews: (1) parents' views of the existing and the desired ratio between the languages in different age groups and their opinions on language policy and model in the preschools; and (2) parents' suggestions about changes to the existing language policy.

Concerning the interviews with the pedagogical staff, the following content categories will be analyzed: (1) first language as a language of instruction, (2) rationalization of the '*First Language First*' approach and (3) negotiation between teachers and parents on the challenges of the existing language model.

Results and discussion

The results are presented in two sections. First, the data obtained from the quantitative stage will be presented. The second part of the results provides analysis of the qualitative data of the parents' and the pedagogical staff's interviews. The results presentation will be followed by a discussion.

Self-administered questionnaire

Figure 1 shows that 71% of the parents preferred predominantly Russian input in the 2- to 3-year-old age group. More than 50% of the parents attributed greater importance to the balance between the two languages in the preschool from age 3 with a growing input of Hebrew as the children grow older. Even though reported preference of Hebrew predominance increased from 3% in the 2- to 3-year-old age group to 33% in the 4- to 5-year-old age group, still the balance between the languages was preferred.

The parents' opinion about the existing ratio between the languages points out L1 predominance at all age groups (see Figure 2), while a balanced input has been reported less at the age groups that were presented previously (see Figure 1) as more important to the balance between the two languages (38% at ages 3–5 and 35% at ages 4–5).

Indeed, the correlational analysis showed that the parents' language preferences are not related to the existing ratio between the languages in the 2- to 3-year-old age group, which is considered to be the first age group of gradual immersion in Hebrew. While the parents desired a more balanced approach in this period, the preschool provides gradual immersion with considerable L1 predominance. As for the other two age groups, a higher correlation was obtained in the 3- to 4-year-old age group ($r = .39, p < .01$), and a weaker but still significant correlation was obtained in the 4- to 5-year-old age group ($r = .33, p < .01$).

Regarding the parents' reliance on the pedagogical staff, it can be seen that for 64% of the parents, the ratio between the languages is very important (see Figure 3). In addition, most parents (64%) reported on their reliance on the pedagogical staff in determining the language ratio.

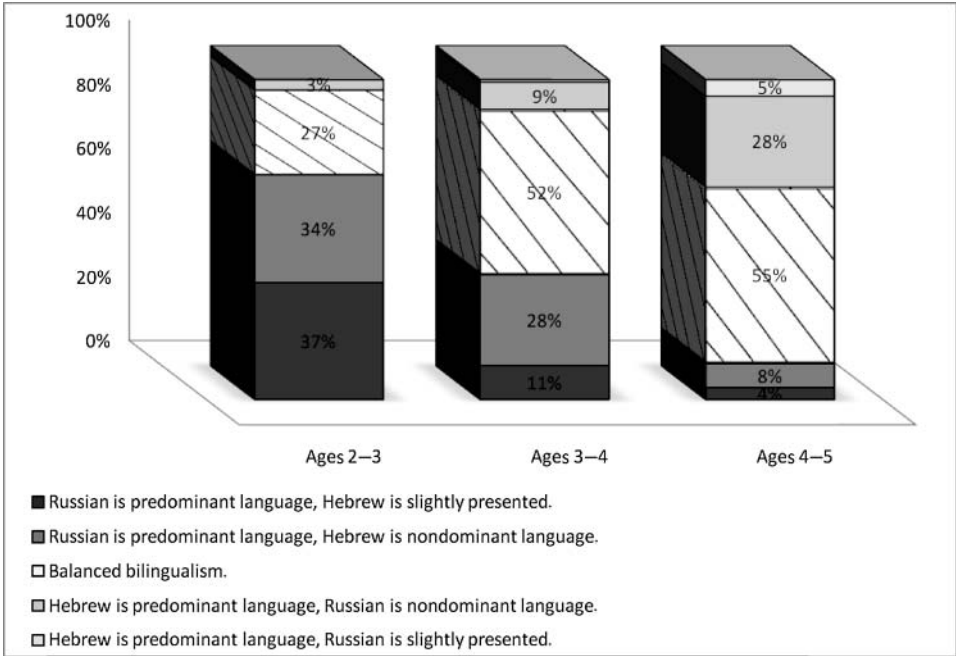


Figure 1. The parents' representations about the desired ratio between the heritage and host languages for different age groups of children (2–3, 3–4, 4–5 years) in a bilingual preschool (%) ($n = 260$).

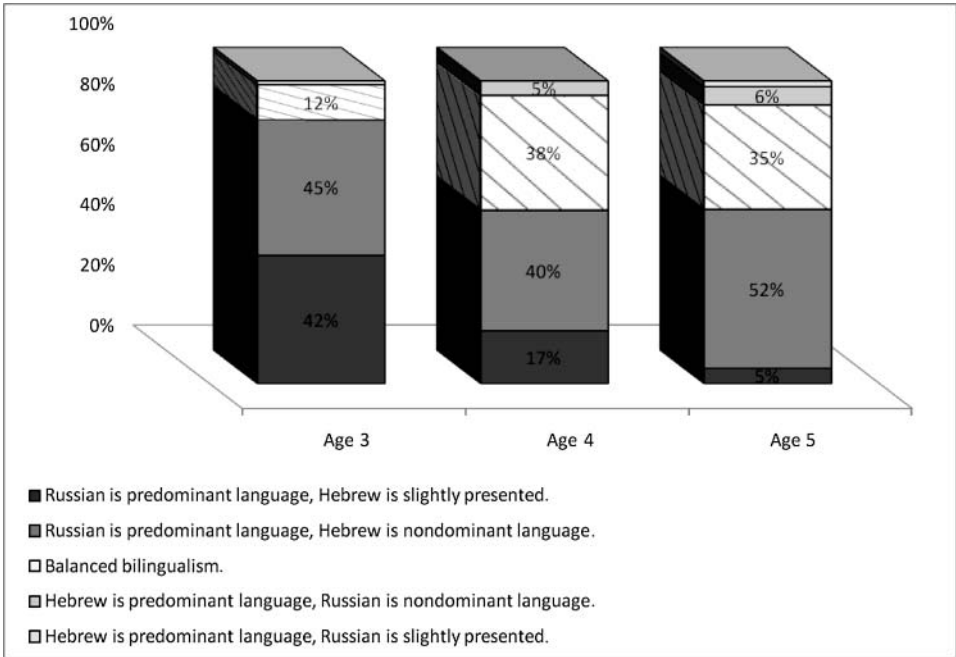


Figure 2. The parents' representations about the existing ratio between the heritage and host languages in the preschool (%) ($n = 260$).

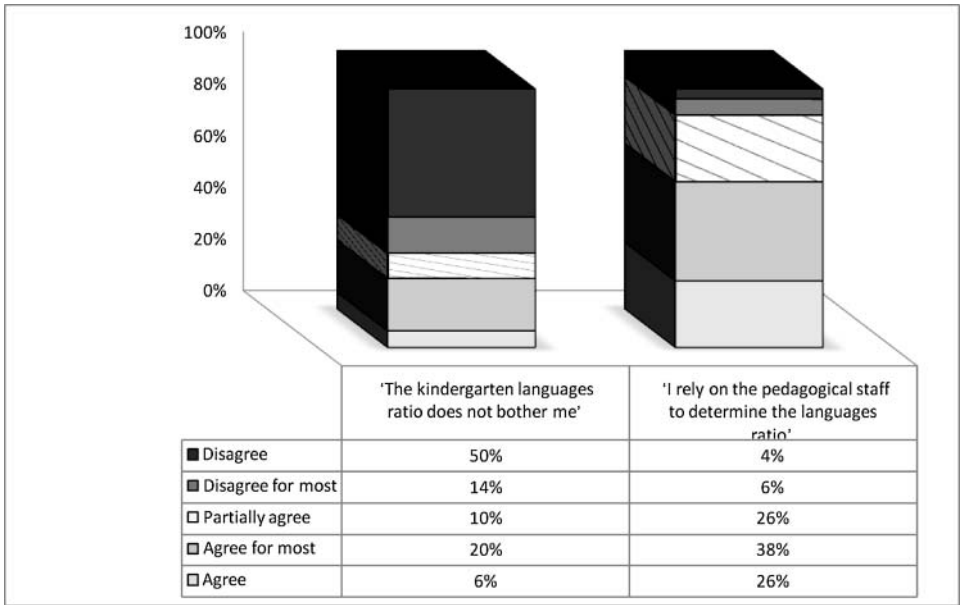


Figure 3. The parents' reliance on the pedagogical staff concerning the ratio between the target languages ($n = 260$).

Parents definitely prefer the '*First Language First*' approach up to age three, which is in line with the language policy of this network. Several sociocultural and sociolinguistic factors can possibly explain representations and attitudes toward preschool bilingual development and the education of second-generation children, such as symbolic and instrumental values of the acquisition of the Russian language in Israel. Thus, the "critical mass" of Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel (around 20% of the Jewish population) creates objective premises for a more pragmatic value of Russian language acquisition. The symbolic value of Russian is related to these immigrants' attitude towards Russian as their cultural and linguistic heritage (Leshem and Shuval 1998; Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Stavans and Goldzweig 2008).

In addition, support of the '*First Language First*' approach might be attributed to the demographic characteristics of target families: as noted earlier, most children who attend bilingual Russian-Hebrew preschools come from families in which both parents emigrated from the former Soviet Union.

Finally, it might be that some parents as lay linguists view the '*First Language First*' approach as a basis for successful L2 acquisition. This assumption will be verified during the qualitative stage of the study.

Concerning the ratio between the target languages after age three, it is clear that the parents expected input that is more balanced. However, the Hebrew (L2) input was still lower than the Russian (L1) and unbalanced. The unresolved question remains as to why most of the parents are concerned with a discrepancy between the existing and the desired language ratio after age three and how they negotiate this discrepancy. The in-depth interviews shed light on this issue.

To conclude, it seems that this group of immigrant parents has a rather active position concerning the language model of bilingual education. This finding is in line with previous

qualitative data on the parenting characteristics of this immigrant community and might be attributed to the relatively high educational level of the parents.

Parents' views on language policy and model in the preschools

This paper analyzes and discusses some of the content categories, extracted from parents' interviews: (1) parents' views of the existing and the desired ratio between the languages in different age groups and their opinions on language policy and model in the preschools; and (2) parents' suggestions about changes to the existing language policy.

Parents' views of the existing and the desired ratio between languages in different age groups and their opinions on language policy and model in the preschools

It was reported that the parents' representations about the existing ratio between the languages were based on their discussions with staff and their own occasional observations during visits to the preschool. Similar to the data obtained from the quantitative stage of the study, the parents' reports evidenced the discrepancy between the existing and the desired language ratio after age three, and Russian language input predominance:

Maya: From 2 to 3 years they speak only Russian. However, they do sing songs in Hebrew. Thus, they have a little Hebrew vocabulary but still this language is difficult for them. From 3 to 4 years they have a certified teacher who gives lessons in Hebrew. In my opinion, she does not do it very effectively.

As in the case of the questionnaire results, all of our parents stressed that the issue of the ratio between the languages is significant for them. The growing concern about the lack of balance between Russian and Hebrew has been discussed by the parents with the preschool principals and teachers during teacher–parent meetings. It appeared that the most convincing argument in support for the existing language policy was that other parents in the preschools noted the successful inclusion and adjustment of their elder children in the monolingual educational system after their experience in the bilingual education:

Faina: We were worried when David (the child) was 4 years old. The year was almost over and our son barely made progress in Hebrew The principal tried to calm us down. But I calmed down more due to the other parents whose eldest kids had finished this preschool before. They told us that after this preschool their children did very well at school. We were promised that from 4 to 5 we would observe the dramatic change and our children would speak Hebrew fluently. That proved to be true. Now our child knows fancy words in Hebrew and he feels no problem to speak Hebrew.

All of our parents reported that their primary aim in choosing this network was the intergenerational transmission of Russian as a home language. However, they stressed that the discrepancy between the expected level of Hebrew at age 4 and their perception of the real competence in Hebrew raised even fear of failure to adjust further in Hebrew-speaking monolingual kindergarten. For example, Oksana, who belongs to the 1.5 generation and immigrated to Israel at age 15, during the interview repeated in parts her personal, painful story of being an adolescent immigrant who had to adjust to an unknown educational system in an unfamiliar language. The following excerpt illustrates how Oksana links her opinion of the preschool language model to her personal dramatic life experience:

Oksana: Only starting with the age of 4, the children started learning Hebrew intensively. It took him [her son] about half a year to start communicating in Hebrew. I was worried a lot because he refused to communicate with Hebrew-speaking kids in the playground. I did not

want him to experience the same problem that I did as a newcomer. Obviously, I hope that he will acquire Hebrew faster since he is very young I realize it depends on the kid. I came to Israel when I was 15 and Hebrew acquisition was a long process for me. I came as a 10th grader and I was stressed. When I had to catch up with the material for the matriculation exams

Note, however, that in a minute Oksana hesitated and added once again that she does not expect a similar problem with adjustment for this son since he was born in Israel ('But I believe that Daniel will succeed more'). In this context, it is interesting that even though the parents were aware that the children's level of competence in Hebrew is still low in comparison with their monolingual peers, most of them did not dramatize this reality. Based on their own and their friends' positive personal experience with L2 acquisition, the parents were optimistic and convinced that their children's problems with Hebrew are just temporary and will disappear soon:

Josef: . . . I am not worried about Hebrew: in 2–3 years she will be speaking it better than me and my wife. The most important thing is for her to know Russian language and way of life.

Elina: . . . I think that the language acquisition depends on the individual skills and abilities. In my opinion, if she [her daughter] arrived in Israel now [from Russia], she would learn Hebrew perfectly. I don't make a problem out of it I just hope that a skillful child who doesn't have any learning disabilities will acquire Hebrew well when she goes to the first grade and start working with more advanced material.

This high level of parental self-confidence is attributable to their beliefs in the effect of the sociolinguistic milieu that could provide language acquisition, and the parents' assumption that there is a direct correspondence between the amount of time spent by the children in the target language environment (i.e. monolingual-speaking kindergarten and, after that, monolingual school) and the acquisition of this language (Schwartz, Moin, and Leikin 2011).

In addition to the positive personal experience of these parents, this optimistic view of non-problematic Hebrew acquisition might be also explained by the fact that this immigrant community is characterized by relatively rapid and successful acquisition of L2 and integration as the main acculturation strategy (Olshtain and Kotik 2000; Lissitsa 2007).

Parents' suggestions about changes in the existing language policy

All parents suggested that the onset of Hebrew input should be earlier than age three by means of gradual exposure, with the Hebrew ratio increasing up to 70%–80% in the last age group, at ages 4–5. The following excerpt illustrates this position:

Maya: I think that it would be an ideal situation if each group starting with the age of two had a Hebrew-speaking teacher, like the one we had last year. She can introduce Hebrew to children gradually, until afternoon. This way the language will start to be activated earlier. When their brains are still very young, they will absorb everything they hear from around. This way their Hebrew vocabulary will be gradually built up. Then, when they come to the Hebrew-speaking environment, they will not have a feeling that they are thrown into the deep water without knowing how to swim.

At the same time, all of the parents except one fully supported Russian dominance for the first three years of children's linguistic development, which is in line with the results obtained in the questionnaires and converged with the language policy of this network. Arcady explained their agreement in favor of the '*First Language First*' policy in the following way:

Arcady: In Israel people speak Hebrew. The child will not be isolated. When he goes to school and the army, he will learn Hebrew well. Russian is a different story. If he is not given it from the very beginning, it will fade.

In addition to the essential need of L1 maintenance ('it will fade'), the parents noted that on the basis of 'mother tongue', the Hebrew language will 'be absorbed better and earlier'. That is, they addressed one of the main arguments in favor of the '*First Language First*' approach, which will be further elaborated by the teachers in the following section.

Finally, parents noted that, in their opinion, the Hebrew language should be gradually built up 'as building blocks':

Michael: In my opinion, it is easier to begin with the mother tongue. Speaking the mother tongue in preschool is a good idea. This way you organize child's knowledge gradually and put it in his memory as building blocks.

This view is convergent with the main arguments in favor of the '*First Language First*' approach, namely that learning is more difficult in an unfamiliar language. As will be further shown, this view converges with one of the main arguments in favor of this approach presented by the teachers.

To conclude, the parents' follow-up of their children's bilingual development was found to be an essential part of their language practice and management. They were aware of the existing language policy weaknesses and actively discussed them with the pedagogical staff within the framework of formal as well as informal teacher-parent meetings. As Tomlinson (1984) emphasized, this dialogue is crucial to release tensions and misunderstandings between parents' expectations and what education can actually offer. As will be presented further, the parents' voices have been heard.

Teachers' reflections on their language policy

As was presented earlier, the '*First Language First*' approach (i.e. language model) is addressed as a practical implication of the language policy adopted by the educational staff of the target bilingual preschools. The following content categories will be analyzed in this section: (1) first language as a language of instruction, (2) rationalization of the '*First Language First*' approach and (3) negotiation between teachers and parents on the challenges of the existing language model.

Parents are not teachers: first language as a language of instruction

Fishman (1991) expressed his skepticism as to whether bilingual schooling on its own can reverse the process whereby one language is substituted by another, since a minority language requires a solid social base in order to trigger its transmission. At the same time, as it was expressed by the general manager of the target bilingual network, it seems that only an educational context with a structural approach toward language instruction can support minority language growth over and above 'spontaneous' everyday lexical knowledge, which cannot be expected to develop into academic knowledge by itself (Snow et al. 1991):

David, the general manager: Our idea of child bilingualism is the following: Russian as a first language has to be supported in order to maintain the child's identity, individuality, roots . . . The aim of the preschool is to support not only the colloquial Russian which can be learned at home from parents, but to supply children with a 'high', literate variety of the Russian language. A preschool is supposed to be not only a care-giver but an educational institution.

In this clearly defined position, David expressed the language policy of this network as a language instruction policy. It is also noteworthy that even though David is a Hebrew

speaker and in Israel where Hebrew is not only a dominant majority language but also a symbolic language and loaded concept (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999), he realized that the value of a child's minority language in a bilingual framework is crucial to the child's development of identity and empowerment.

Rationalization of the 'First Language First' approach

Similar to the parents, questions about input in each language, the ratio between L1 and L2, and changes of this ratio in different age groups are central issues for the pedagogical staff. The sequential onset of Hebrew begins as the basic linguistic structures and the lexicon in Russian are acquired. In reflecting on the history of the preschool, Olga, the principal, reported that at the onset of the preschool, the languages were introduced concurrently and in a more or less balanced way. However, later, the principals and teachers realized that it is more important to support Russian at an age at which the initial acquisition of the first language has not yet been completed:

Olga, the principal: At the beginning, Russian was presented at the every-day level, without being a subject of teaching The conviction that the Russian language is important increased with the time. We stopped introducing Hebrew as soon as possible. Hebrew exists as the background until the age of three. The main language to be developed is Russian. Children just develop the awareness of the coexistence of two languages

The teachers also pointed out that the necessity in the sequence of language acquisition and placing L1 first in this sequence *versus* simultaneous input of both languages from the beginning can be explained by the need of gradual immersion in L2:

Olga, the principal: First of all, we offer a gradual transition from one language environment to the other. With small children, we communicate mostly in Russian, so they don't have stress as they start attending preschool. Here they can express themselves and also have a feeling that they are understood. We introduce Hebrew gradually. From the age of three on the input in Hebrew constantly increases We apply scaffolding and try to prevent stress caused by confrontation with the new language for children 'terrified' by Hebrew.

The gradual increasing of L2 input to prevent the children's stress over a new language is a main argument in research in favor of the '*First Language First*' approach; that is, that a learner of a new language might suffer when his language is not represented in an important institution of society (Cummins 2000; Baker 2001). In addition, Olga used the notion of scaffolding as a teachers' strategy to ease children's exposure to Hebrew. In this context, it is notable that the pedagogical conception of this network is grounded in Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory (1978). In this case, instruction in Russian before instruction in Hebrew plays a role of scaffolding with the changing amount of L1 input over time:

Elena, the principal: In this way, the idea of a transitional preschool was created – preschool as scaffolding . . . one step in the gradual transition from the home to the monolingual preschool. The parents spoke with the child in Russian at home. The child learned Hebrew in preschool but the child's Russian was developing in parallel; in fact, on the basis of Russian the Hebrew language was acquired.

Even the Hebrew (L1)-speaking teacher inserted 'Russian' words in her communication with children during Hebrew time in specific contexts such as the adaptation of a new child who does not know Hebrew or L1 empowerment – 'to give the child a good feeling':

Aviva, the majority language teacher: When I first came to the preschool I learned three words: *sopli* [runny nose], *pit* [drink] and *molodetz* [good for you] It was important to say

these words to the children, to communicate with them. The first two words, clearly, are about hygiene and the third is just to give the child a good feeling.

Initially, Aviva uses some Russian words to break the ice, but as time goes on she adopts a full Hebrew language strategy based on the language separation principle. This enables her not only to communicate with newcomers but also to empower the children. Hence, inserting such words and utterances as instructions or endearments in Russian during official Hebrew time is legitimate.

In addition, the '*First Language First*' approach is rationalized by the presentation of Russian as a source of successful L2 acquisition:

Elena, the principal: Why Hebrew from age three? We thought that the child needs to advance in the home language. At age three, the narrative ability appears, the language is established more or less. On the basis of one language as a foundation I can give the second language and the first one will continue to develop . . .

Definitely, Elena perceived this approach as facilitating the early sequential bilinguals' rapid progress in the acquisition of Hebrew vocabulary, as was also noted by some parents. Within a broader theoretical context of L2 acquisition, there is growing empirical evidence that supports the '*First Language First*' approach as a mature ground for L2 acquisition in different language domains. In accordance with Paradis' maturational hypothesis, there is: 'the possibility that age of onset interacts with ambient language exposure time such that L2 children may acquire their L2 faster than children who have been acquiring this language from birth, either monolingually or bilingually' (2008, 1). Recently, this hypothesis received evidence in the domain of vocabulary acquisition (Golberg, Paradis, and Crago 2008).

The initial instruction of topics in L1 was viewed by the teachers as a springboard for L2 sequential teaching. To illustrate, in discussing her own instructional strategies as well as those of the Russian-speaking teachers, Aviva, the majority language teacher, explains this strategy:

Aviva, Hebrew-speaking preschool teacher: They are provided with instruction in Russian first, and then I can take them more easily. To have a conversation with them when they are three and I can speak with them like they are five. This helps me . . . I taught them something on Sunday, but [the children] didn't understand anything. On Monday [the other teacher] explained it again, but in Russian, with the same pictures and the same recording/video, and the same dance. On Tuesday, they already understood me . . . and made progress with it . . . and I continued in Hebrew.

Aviva's description reflects the language policy of the network and her insights into bilingual children's ability to transfer conceptual knowledge from L1 to L2, enhancing the role of L1. This concurs with accepted theories of language development such as the *Interdependent Hypothesis* (Cummins 2000) and the cognitive theory of learning (O'Malley and Chamot 1990). Even so, Aviva did not address explicitly Cummins' (2000) hypothesis in her report; her awareness of a possible concept transfer from L1 to L2 derives from her daily experience, encouraging her to continue this very effective practice.

Negotiation between teachers and parents on challenges of the existing language model

The interviews with teachers revealed that in their opinion, on the whole, the parents support their language policy, as was reported in the questionnaire. In the following passage, Olga, the minority-language-speaking teacher, explains the parents' expectation from the preschool:

Olga, the minority language teacher: First of all, the maintenance of their first language, in order to prevent the intergenerational connections from breakage. There are families where grandparents speak Russian to the children, but parents speak Hebrew, because many parents arrived here as they were very young and are more competent in Hebrew than in Russian.

In this context, it is interesting that the majority language teacher, Orly, did not note a high level of parents' concern about Hebrew in comparison with their worry about teaching math and learning Russian and even English. For instance, Orly reported about the parents who push for 'as much training and teaching as possible', since it favors their children's development:

Orly, the majority-language-speaking teacher: Some parents place very high demands on the education of their children; they expect that their children will receive as much training and teaching in the preschool as possible, however not in Hebrew but in math, English, Russian. That means that the parents are not concerned about their children's Hebrew skills and are quite sure that kids will learn Hebrew anyway. Parents are concerned that children might forget Russian after starting school.

This teacher's opinions about attitudes and expectations of the parents are in accordance with data obtained from some interviews in which the parents expressed their belief in the effect of the Hebrew-speaking linguistic environment in the monolingual kindergarten and after that in school that could support language acquisition ('... kids will learn Hebrew anyway'). In addition, Orly's comment is in line with previous data on the immigrant parents from the former Soviet Union for whom their child's academic success was a very important personal objective in the country of origin, as well as in Israel as the host country (Horowitz 1986).

At the same time, the teachers were also aware of the parents' growing concern about their children's slow progress in Hebrew, which has been made evident in this study by both quantitative and qualitative data. The minority language teacher, Olga, reflects on parents' worry about Hebrew and stresses that this concern is characteristic in families who had not had earlier experience with this bilingual setting in the following excerpt:

Olga, the minority language teacher: We have several parents that are concerned about Hebrew; usually these are with the first child in the family. But I always say that if a child develops normally, he or she will not have problems with Hebrew, because later he or she will be surrounded by Hebrew in gan-khova (Hebrew-speaking kindergarten). My experience of many years confirms that children will not have problems with Hebrew.

It is also noteworthy that all interviewees highlighted that the parental feedback is very important for them. The analysis of the interviews demonstrated that the language policy and its management in this preschool network in light of parents' recent complaints is a negotiation process with consideration about what should be stressed, changed, neglected and inserted in the present language model. The main principle of this negotiation is discussion with parents and among the pedagogical staff, followed by language strategies and curriculum changes. To illustrate, this concern has recently been widely discussed during the network's professional meetings. As a result, the input of Hebrew was decided to begin earlier from its 'tasting' in the 2- to 3-year-old age group during '15 minutes of structural instruction, three times a week', as explained by Elena, the preschool principal.

Conclusions

The results of this study demonstrate that teachers' readiness to listen carefully to parental concerns might make the parent-teacher communication process fruitful and productive,

making the resolution of the existing problem an achievable goal. Shared sociocultural experience seems to facilitate each side 'hearing' the other. Yet, it seems that the teachers and the parents might work together more successfully to better bridge the discrepancy in their views on the optimal language ratio in the target bilingual preschools. In line with the conclusions of Sheffer (2003) and Lee (1999), some practical steps are necessary to create a consensual dialogue and follow up with modification of the existing model. Thus, it seems that the parents need to do more research – and receive a practice-based explanation for the '*First Language First*' approach; for example, such an aspect as the possible transfer of conceptual knowledge from L1 to L2 in accordance with the *Interdependent Hypothesis* (Cummins 2000). In particular, parents' counseling might address recent data that relatively late L2 immersion might result in the *anchoring* of L2 vocabulary development by the advanced level of the L1 vocabulary (Golberg, Paradis, and Crago 2008; Schwartz, Moin, and Leikin forthcoming). In this context, the *maturation hypothesis* assumes that L1 vocabulary may facilitate the conceptual-lexical mappings between L1 and L2, and as a result, older learners who began learning L2 after the onset of L1 acquisition (i.e. sequentially to L1) can actually accumulate vocabulary faster than younger L2 learners over a course of the same amount of exposure (Paradis 2008). In addition, parents' counseling might focus on parents' awareness of the developmental trajectory of the bilingual children in comparison with their monolingual peers. In this context, both the advantages and challenges of bilingual development need to be clarified (Bialystok 2009).

This study has important implications for administrators, educational consultants and bilingual teachers. Over and above the conclusions which can be drawn about this particular bilingual network, this study highlights the necessity for educators to reevaluate and rethink bilingual language policy in collaboration with parents. More specifically, parental concerns about bilingual development of their children need to be discussed in an open dialogue with administrators and educators to avoid mismatch between parental expectations and what the preschool actually applies, and even conflict between them (Guo and Mohan 2008). Over and above parent–teacher meetings, parents' collaboration might be expressed by their participation in policy decision-making on the language curriculum.

In addition to addressing the parental concerns, the efficacy of the target language policy model could be measured by examining both parents' and pedagogical staff's reports and by examining children's actual language knowledge in different linguistic domains. There is a growing body of data so that the immigrant parents might be enabled to assess their children's language in an adequate way. This evaluation allows them to build up their family language management (Gutiérrez-Clellen and Kreiter 2003; Bedore et al. 2011). At the same time, because of a possible cognitive and motivational bias, parents' general assessments as lay people might not be so accurate compared with the results of a structured measuring system (e.g. Kelley and Michela 1980; Kruglanski and Ajzen 1983). Moreover, it is noteworthy that in our study, the parents' (as lay people) assessments of Hebrew (L2) mostly related to vocabulary and ignored other language domains. In this context, testing of the children's linguistic knowledge might validate parents' and teachers' assessments. Finally, based on the results of testing, the administrators and educators might provide ongoing support in L1 or L2 by introducing more activities in the target language and by offering additional target language training for those children who had significant difficulties with this language.

In addition, by addressing in the same study both parents' and teachers' voices on language policy, we obtained a deeper understanding of parent–teacher interactions and negotiations of their views. This methodological approach attempts to avoid a narrow investigation of each of these voices as separate and unrelated. Finally, methodological

triangulation with a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches might enhance the validity and reliability of the information about language policy as a complex phenomenon (Johnson 1992).

Note

1. The names of the preschools have been changed.

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