

# The Social Underpinnings of Language Practices in Swedish-English Families

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## *Abstract*

By means of a large-scale quantitative approach, this study examines the declared family language practices of Swedish-English bilingual families living in Sweden, and how an array of family-external and family-internal social factors correlate with divergences in these practices. For the purpose of this study, a Swedish-English bilingual family consists of two parents, one of which is an L1 English speaker, and the other is an L1 Swedish speaker, as well as their children. The data comes from a digital questionnaire completed by 438 families, which was analysed using non-parametric statistics. The results show that despite a preference for English amongst the parents in these families, their children are more likely to use Swedish in sibling interaction, which can be regarded as an indication of the influence of wider society on home language practices. The results also show that a number of social factors correlated with a divergence in declared language practices in these families, namely, parental occupation, the migratory history of the family, parent's marital status, family involvement in parent-child English speaking groups, and whether the mother or the father was the L1 English speaker. Other typically cited social factors, such as parental education level, showed no significant correlation with declared language practices in these families. The study comments on raising bilingual children in a context where both languages are valued in society, and the implications for this internationally. The study also exemplifies the complex, context sensitive situation that is encountered when attempting to fully understand family language policies more generally.

Keywords: family language policy; bilingual families; home language; Sweden

## *1. Introduction*

Research into the field of *family language policy* (FLP) has experienced exponential growth in recent years. Most of these studies are grounded in qualitative research paradigms, which draw their data from a limited pool of participants (Juvonen, Eisenclas, Roberts, and Schalley, 2020). The study reported on in this article aims to bring a different perspective than most FLP research by employing a large-scale quantitative approach

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using data collected from digital questionnaires.<sup>1</sup> In particular, this study aims to use this large-scale quantitative approach to investigate the social factors underpinning language practices in bilingual families, which have until now been primarily explored through small-scale qualitative means. The presupposition that the wider social environment has an influence over family language practices has been well documented (Van Mol and De Valk, 2018: 667; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009: 355). The present study seeks to use the collected family language practice data and quantitatively analyse the influence of various social factors on those declared language practices. The social factors investigated are informed by current FLP research which links sociopolitical, sociocultural, socioeconomic, sociolinguistic, and micro-familial factors to language practices (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen and Huang, 2020; Spolsky, 2004). This study can be regarded as a response to the call for more investigations into the social aspects of bilingualism, which are still under-researched compared to purely linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects (Juvonen et al., 2020: 54).

The target population in focus here are families residing in Sweden in which one parent is an L1<sup>2</sup> English speaker and one parent is an L1 Swedish speaker, a population which has received limited scholarly attention to date (see, however, Boyd, Jørgensen, and Latomaa, 1994, and Boyd, 1998). This population differs from many previously researched bilingual family constellations in several ways. Previous studies have often investigated bilingual families living in countries in which English is the primary societal language, while in the context of this study, English is not spoken as an everyday societal language in most domains, but does have “a near ubiquitous presence” in Sweden, and members of the population “generally have high levels of communicative competence” (Henry, 2016: 443). The Swedish sociolinguistic milieu in which these families find themselves makes for a context where traditional majority versus minority language dynamics differ from many other international settings, and is therefore a unique

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<sup>1</sup> See, however, De Houwer (2007); Dekeyser and Stevens (2019); Van Mol and De Valk, (2018) for studies using large-scale questionnaires to examine family language patterns.

<sup>2</sup> First language.

site for examining the relationship between societal language ideologies and their influence on home language<sup>3</sup> regimes.

The aim of this study is twofold: firstly, to uncover the declared language practices of Swedish-English families in terms of language used between parents, language used between parents and their children, and language used between children in a family; and secondly, to examine which social factors seem to exert influence over these family language practices. Thus, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1 What are the declared family language practices of Swedish-English bilingual families living in Sweden?

RQ2 Which social factors correlate with a divergence in declared family language practices, and how strong is the correlation?

The subsequent sections turn firstly to a discussion of past research on the linguistic behaviour of bilingual families. This is followed by a consideration of the underlying social factors that have previously been identified as variables which influence family language practices. Finally, the role of English in Swedish society is discussed.

## *2. Linguistic Behaviour in Bilingual Families*

Although somewhat less commonly researched than other bilingual family configurations (Van Mol and De Valk, 2018: 66), research into language practices and policies in families in which parents do not share a first language has been a topic of scholarly interest since at least the turn of the twentieth century (Ronjat, 1913), and attention to and research into these types of families has been on the rise in recent years (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013). The most commonly discussed parent-to-child language practice within this parental linguistic configuration is that of the ‘one parent one language’ approach (OPOL) (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004). OPOL is frequently described by informants as the most natural approach to language use in such families, as well as the most effective method for raising bilingual children (Döpke, 1992; Takeuchi, 2006). Despite the popularity of OPOL and its perceived

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<sup>3</sup> The term *home language* is used here to describe any language used in the home amongst family members.

efficiency in language transmission, strict adherence to the approach is uncommon in practice (Palviainen and Boyd, 2013).

Non-OPOL approaches within such bilingual families have also received attention in the literature. The ‘minority language at home’ approach involves both parents in a family speaking the minority (non-societal) language to their children (De Houwer, 2009; Yamamoto, 2001). In the context of the present study, this would be realised as both parents speaking English to their children. The ‘majority language at home’ approach is the opposite (Slavkov, 2017), which in the present study would mean that both parents speak Swedish to their children. There also exist various mixed approaches in which parents’ language choice differs depending on the context, and even approaches consisting of so-called translanguaging practices where languages are mixed to varying degrees at the utterance level (Soler and Zabrodska, 2017).

Previous family language research has often focused on language practices (observed or declared) between parents and their children, whereas less attention has been given to child-to-child language practices, and especially to parent-to-parent language practices (Juvonen et al., 2020: 43). Nevertheless, the usefulness of this type of data has been exemplified by Paugh (2005), who discusses how an examination into language use between children may give an insight into their agency, while Canagarajah (2008) showed how parent-to-parent and child-to-child language data can be combined to develop a greater understanding of language shift. The present study aims to contribute new knowledge to fill the research gap by investigating parent-to-parent and child-to-child language practices in addition to parent-to-child language practices.

### *3. The Underlying Family-External and Family-Internal Social Factors Influencing Language Practice*

Much research on the home language regimes of bilingual families has investigated the interrelatedness between various family-external and family-internal factors and language policies. This study views *language practices* as the actualisation of a FLP, which may be explicitly acknowledged or implicit, convert, and unarticulated (King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry, 2008; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King and Fogle, 2017), and adopts the view that a FLP can be interpreted through the declared communicative practices between family members (Van Mensel, 2018:

234). A declared language practice is however only a declaration and should not be equated with *actual* language practices.

Grin (2006) indicates that at any level, language policies are influenced by sociological, linguistic, political, and economic dimensions, while Spolsky (2004) places a clear emphasis on the social perspective, with reference to how sociopolitical, sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociolinguistic environments affect language policy. Spolsky's four overarching social dimensions will serve as the foundation for data collection and analysis as regards family-external influencing factors in this study. Table 1 shows how these family-external dimensions may be realised as factors which influence family language practices, along with example studies which have previously discussed that factor.

Table 1. Family-external factors which potentially influence language practices.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Primary dimension(s)</b>	<b>Studies</b>
Parental employment status	Socioeconomic	Hoff-Ginsberg (1998); Tuominen (1999)
Parental education level	Socioeconomic	Lambert and Taylor (1996); Van Tubergen and Kalmijn (2009)
Minority language social network	Sociolinguistic, Sociocultural	Kaveh (2018); Lanza and Svendsen (2007)
Place of habitation	Sociocultural	Wright Fogle (2013); Paugh (2005)
Frequency of visits to countries where minority language is spoken	Sociocultural, Sociolinguistic	De Capua and Wintergerst (2009); Pauwels (2005)
Participation in minority language community groups	Sociocultural, Sociolinguistic	Canagarajah (2008); Oriyama (2016)
Citizenship (e.g. the ability to live and work in a country)	Sociopolitical	da Costa Cabral (2018); Van Mol and De Valk (2018)
Parent's place of origin	Sociocultural, Sociolinguistic	Hu and Ren (2017); Nandi (2018)

The family-external factors should be viewed as a set of interconnected items which also have the potential to influence each other. A family's socioeconomic status is likely to influence their place of habitation, while the place of habitation is likely to influence social networks, participation in minority language groups, and educational opportunities. Although all the families reported on in this study have one L1 English speaker parent, the place of origin of those parents may be vastly different in terms of geographic distance, as well as in cultural distance. Those who have migrated to Sweden from European countries (primarily the UK and Ireland) will have had the right to live and work in Sweden due to their EU citizenship, and have a relatively short trip should they wish to visit their country of origin. Visiting a parent's country of origin has been shown to increase the willingness of children in bilingual families to speak the minority language (Pauwels, 2005: 125–6). The L1 English speakers in this study come from a range of different cultures, all with their own sociocultural and sociolinguistic norms. Some parents will have been raised in officially bilingual countries, while others will have come from countries in which an English-only ideology is prevalent (Wiley and Lukes, 1996). These different norms, lived experiences, and expectations derived from family-external factors are likely to influence the language practices in these families.

The discussion now turns to the family-internal factors drawn on in this study. Table 2 shows a number of family-internal factors which have been discussed as variables which may influence family language practices.

Table 2. Family-internal factors which potentially influence language practices.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Studies</b>
Number of children in a family	Caldas (2012), Tuominen (1999)
Age of children	Ochs and Scheiffelin (1984), Pauwels (2005)
Mother or father as minority language speaker	Al-Sahafi (2015), Veltman (1981)
Marital status of parents	Macleory Obied (2010)

The idea that the number of children in a family influences language practices has been discussed by Caldas (2012), who indicated that parents can control home language use more effectively when there is

only one child in the family, while Tuominen (1999) suggested that younger siblings may acquire the societal language more rapidly because older siblings bring it home from school and socialise parents into using it more often. This, then, suggests that family language practices are not static, but instead evolve over spatiotemporal planes. In addition to the number of children, the age of children in a family may play an important role in understanding the practices in bilingual families. Caldas (2012: 356) writes that FLPs may be disrupted due to child peer pressure from external sources, and Ochs and Scheiffelin (1984) have discussed how this peer-group influence is at its peak during adolescence. Both studies suggest that family language practices may alter once a child reaches a certain age. The mother versus the father as the minority language speaker could also be an influencing factor in family language practices, with Veltman (1981) reporting that children show a preference for the mother's language, although De Houwer (2007) failed to find any evidence of this. Okita (2002) further showed that fathers may be less invested than mothers in their child's language development in certain contexts. Finally, the marital status of the parents should also be considered, as the breakup of a family unit can result in changes in daily language exposure. Macleory Obied, (2010: 234) reports on how one previously bilingual family environment shifted to a monolingual majority language environment after a parental divorce, although much variation in the resulting linguistic environments seems to occur depending on each particular circumstance.

#### *4. The Role of English in Swedish Society*

Although English is not an official language in Sweden, it is universally taught as a foreign language from primary school, and has actually grown close to a second language in terms of proficiency and exposure (Cabau, 2009). In a 2015 report, 93% of Swedes declared that English was the most useful foreign language for personal development, and 86% said they know English well enough to have a conversation (European Commission, 2015). The interplay between the Swedish and English in Sweden has been the subject of many recent scholarly investigations (Bolton and Meierkord, 2013; Garcia-Yeste, 2013; Hult, 2005; Salö, 2016), as well as a topic often featuring in non-academic venues (Naeslund, 2018; Westerlind, 2019). Past inquires have often discussed a tension between the Swedish and English languages in public and

institutional spheres, where English occupies a prominent ‘transcultural’ position (Hult, 2012), and some (e.g. Teleman and Westman, 1997) have expressed concern over the potential for English to replace Swedish in certain domains. Ideologically speaking, it is “the prestige and visibility of English”, as well as “the perceived need of English” in Sweden which drive these debates (Berg, Hult, and King, 2001: 315; see also Milani (2007) for a summary of the language ideological debate on the Swedish language). What is not yet clear, however, is how these societal ideologies impact the Swedish-English family ecology examined in the present study. In majority-minority language contexts, it is typically the language of the majority which holds the most prestigious position in society, while in this particular context, the linguistic hierarchy is less obvious. With language ideology occupying such a fundamental position in any FLP (King et al., 2008), it should be expected that these societal ideologies will play a role in understanding family language practices in the families investigated in this study.

### *5. Methodology and Data*

In order to examine the declared family language practices of a large number of Swedish-English bilingual families living in Sweden, and the social factors which influence those practices, an online questionnaire design was chosen. This section first discusses how the questionnaire itself was designed, its distribution, and the demographics of the respondents who completed the questionnaire. Finally, the data analysis techniques employed in this study are discussed.

#### *5.1 Questionnaire design*

The questionnaire was designed to consist of 18 primary questions. The questions can be categorised into those whose responses result in predictor variables and those whose responses result in criterion variables; ‘predictor’ and ‘criterion’ variable are preferred in this article over ‘independent’ and ‘dependent’ variable as informed by Sheskin (2010: 264–7). The predictor variables were derived from the responses to the 14 questions which relate to the factors which potentially influence language practices. These 14 questions were grounded in the factors presented in Table 1 and Table 2, that is, those factors which have been suggested to potentially influence family language practices according to

previous research. The responses to the other four questions result in criterion variables which relate to the declared practices themselves. The questionnaire was designed with Survey&Report (Version 4.3.10.5; Artlogik 2019), and was pre-tested for compatibility issues before launch. The questionnaire was deliberately kept short to decrease respondent fatigue (Wagner, 2015), and as no questions were compulsory, a respondent could refrain from answering a question if they wished. A pilot run of the questionnaire indicated that around five minutes were required to complete all the questions. Questions were designed with simplicity in mind, and wherever possible, dropdown menus and checkboxes were preferred to free text answers. Straightforward demographic questions were put first, and questions related to the same topic were grouped as recommended by Rasinger (2013). The predictor variable questions were primarily of a demographic nature. However, a number of questions also asked about a respondent's social networks and their participation in various kinds of social groups. The four criterion variable responses were derived from a set of questions presented in a matrix as in Table 3. Each question asked the respondent to state their language use in various situations on a five-point ordinal scale which ranges from 'Only English' to 'Only Swedish'. The scale was based on De Houwer's (1999) five-point semantic differential language use scale, which indicates frequency of use language on an 'only', 'mainly', 'half of the time', 'sometimes', and 'never' scale. The question relating to child-to-child language practices was hidden if a respondent previously indicated that they only have one child. If 'other' was answered, a respondent was given a free text field to exemplify their answer. One parent completed the questionnaire on behalf of each family.

Table 3. The questions which derive criterion variables.

Please state the language(s) that	Only English	More English than Swedish	Even mix of English and Swedish	More Swedish than English	Only Swedish	Other
(a) you use when speaking with your child(ren)'s other parent	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
(b) you use when speaking with your child(ren)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
(c) your child(ren)'s other parent uses when speaking with your child(ren)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
(d) your children speak with each other	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

This study design only reveals the self-reported declared language practices according to one of the parents in each family. It should be noted that self-reports of language use are not necessarily representative of actual language use (De Houwer, 2009; Juvonen et al., 2020: 43). Further studies may wish to investigate the accuracy of self-reports compared to actual language use, but this study is unable to make any qualified statements regarding how accurate the self-reports are. In addition, this study design does not include language proficiency as a predictor. Although language proficiency likely plays a significant influencing role in understanding FLPs, it was not included here as a variable due to the unreliability of measuring proficiency through self-reported questionnaires (Hultstijn, 2012; Tomoschuk, Ferreira, and Gollan, 2019).

### 5.2 Data collection and sample

The target population for the questionnaire were the parents in English-Swedish bilingual families. This study drew on a definition of an English-Swedish bilingual family that is centred on the child. If a child has one parent who is an L1 English speaker and one parent who is an L1 Swedish speaker, then this constitutes an English-Swedish bilingual family. This study used a self-selection research design in which self-identified L1 speakers of either Swedish or English were invited to complete the questionnaire. It was posted on twenty Sweden-based Facebook groups targeting expatriates from various English speaking countries, bilingual parent-child groups, as well as bilingual educational groups. The questionnaire was also e-mailed to representatives at English speaking schools in Sweden, sports clubs which contain an overrepresentation of English speaking respondents (e.g. rugby and American football), and English departments at Swedish universities. Respondents were encouraged to distribute the questionnaire within their own social circles, which created a snowballing sampling procedure (Dörnyei, 2007: 98). This primarily digital approach to finding participants, plus the sampling procedure, resulted in greater reach, but less control over the skewness of the sample.

This study analysed the completed questionnaires from 438 respondents living in 117 different municipalities throughout Sweden. An additional eleven respondents who declared that their families used languages other than English or Swedish at home were excluded from these analyses. The demographic information of the respondents is found in Table 4.

Table 4. Respondent demographics.

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Country of origin</b>		
The United Kingdom	112	25.6
The United States	100	22.8
Sweden	78	17.8
Canada	54	12.3
Australia	40	9.1
Ireland	25	5.7
New Zealand	6	1.4
Singapore	6	1.4
Other	17	3.9

<b>Place of habitation<sup>4</sup></b>	Large urban area	217	50.8
	Medium urban area	143	33.5
	Rural area	67	15.7
<b>Marital status</b>	Married / Cohabiting	362	82.6
	Divorced / Separated	66	15.1
	Widowed	2	0.5
	Other	8	1.8
<b>Education level</b>	Compulsory school	16	3.7
	Upper-secondary school	52	11.9
	Vocational degree	41	9.4
	Bachelor's degree	188	42.9
	Master's degree	107	24.4
	Doctorate	31	7.1
<b>Employment status<sup>5</sup></b>	Employed (Salarial)	229	52.3
	Employed (Intermediate)	82	18.7
	Employed (Working class)	45	10.3
	Unemployed	19	4.3
	Retired	11	2.5
	Student	26	5.9
	Other	26	5.9
<b>Gender</b>	Female	308	70.3
	Male	130	29.7

The respondents came from a wide range of countries, and as to be expected, most non-Swedish respondents originated from countries which have English as an official language (98.9%). Most respondents were married or live with their partners (82.6%), while 15.1% were divorced or separated. A majority of the respondents were employed either full-time or part-time (81.3%), with most reporting that they worked in professional or intermediate occupations, which also correlates with the relatively high level of education found amongst the respondents (74.4% have at least a bachelor's degree). Turning now to the age of the respondents and the children upon whom they report,

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<sup>4</sup> Municipalities have been divided according to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions' classification.

<sup>5</sup> Professions have been divided into 'salarial', 'intermediate', and 'working class' according to the European Socioeconomic Classification (Rose and Harrison, 2009).

Table 5 shows that the mean age of respondents is almost 42 years old, while the mean age of their children is slightly over ten years old.

Table 5. Respondent and child age information.

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Age of respondent</b>	435	41.96	9.22
<b>Age of children</b>	885	10.05	8.42

The implication for the present study is that a majority of the families have children who are of an age where they currently live at home and attend full-time education, whereas families with adult children are considerably less numerous in this dataset. This skew is likely due to the sampling procedure adopted. The dataset is, however, still more diverse than many previous studies, which have often focused on very young children (Schwartz and Verschik, 2013: 14).

### 5.3 Data analysis

A combination of descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in addressing the research questions. RQ1 drew on descriptive analyses of the data, and was addressed through analysis of three dimensions: child-to-child language practices, parent-to-child language practices, and parent-to-parent language practices. The data for child-to-child language practices were derived from the responses to question (d) in Table 2, and the data for parent-to-parent language practices were derived from the responses to question (a). In order to analyse parent-to-child language practices, it was necessary to combine the responses from questions (b) and (c) along with first language data. The responses from questions (b) and (c) can be combined in 25 different ways as displayed in Figure 1.

Only English	More English than Swedish	Even Mix	More Swedish than English	Only Swedish
Only English				
Only English	More English than Swedish	Even Mix	More Swedish than English	Only Swedish
More English than Swedish				
Only English	More English than Swedish	Even Mix	More Swedish than English	Only Swedish
Even Mix				
Only English	More English than Swedish	Even Mix	More Swedish than English	Only Swedish
More Swedish than English				
Only English	More English than Swedish	Even Mix	More Swedish than English	Only Swedish
Only Swedish				

Figure 1. The 25 potential declared parent-to-child language practices.

These 25 parent-to-child language practice combinations can further be categorised into a FLP continuum that ranges from a monolingual English policy on one extreme (i.e. minority language at home) to a monolingual Swedish policy on the other extreme (i.e. majority language at home). The OPOL policy is found in the top right and bottom left corners. An even mixture of both languages by both parents is indicated in the centre of the figure.

The data collected in order to answer RQ1 functioned as a baseline for RQ2. Inferential statistics were then employed in order to determine whether social factors correlated with a divergence from this baseline, the direction of such a divergence (towards English or Swedish), and the strength of this divergence. Nonparametric tests were chosen over parametric tests because the primary scale used as the criterion variable is an ordinal variable, while parametric tests generally require an interval or ratio level variable (Bandalos, 2010). The two nonparametric tests

used in this study are The Mann Whitney *U* test and the Kruskal-Wallis *H* test.

In this study, the Mann Whitney *U* test assesses if two groups within a predictor variable can be said to have a statistically significant difference in their responses to the five-point language practices scale. The Kruskal-Wallis *H* test is used for analysing predictor variables with more than two groups, and determines if at least one of those groups can be said to have a statistically different distribution (Kruskal and Wallis, 1952). The Kruskal-Wallis *H* test does not indicate between which groups a difference is found. Therefore, in cases where a significant Kruskal-Wallis *H* test was reported, a post hoc Mann Whitney *U* test was conducted to determine which of the groups had a significant pairwise difference.

The Mann Whitney *U* tests were followed by a calculation of effect sizes using the formula  $\frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$ . The *z*-value is calculated from the Mann Whitney *U* test itself, while *N* represents the total number of observations for the tested variable. This formula has been suggested for calculating effect sizes with nonparametric data (Rosenthal, 1994). The value, presented as *r*, is a correlation coefficient indicating the strength of a correlation between two variables, which in this study is realised as the strength of the correlation between a social factor and language practices. The reporting of effect sizes in addition to *p* values is valuable, as the *p* value alone only reports a statistical significance, while the effect size reports a substantive significance (Sullivan and Feinn, 2012). The present study follows Cohen's (2013: 83) guidelines for interpreting effect sizes (small *r* = .10, medium *r* = .30, large *r* = .50). Cohen (2013: 79–81) and Sheskin (2010: 265) note that many of the relationships investigated in social sciences are associated with small effect sizes, and that a small effect size may still be sufficient to reject a null hypothesis, even though an effect size of *r* = .10 implies that only 1% of the variance of the criterion variable is attributable to the predictor variable (calculated by squaring *r*). A medium effect size of *r* = .30 implies 9% of the variance of the criterion variable is attributable to the predictor variable, while this figure is 25% with a large effect size of *r* = .50.

## 6. Results

This section begins with a discussion of the results in relation to RQ1, subdivided into child-to-child language practices, parent-to-parent language practices, and parent-to-child language practices. Following this, RQ2 is addressed, where the focus lies on the social factors and their correlation with divergences in these family language practices.

### 6.1 Child-to-child language practices

The results identify that a preference towards Swedish was found in the declared child-to-child language practices of Swedish-English bilingual families. Figure 2 shows that Swedish was the favoured language (*More Swedish than English plus Only Swedish*) for sibling interaction in 54.4% of the families, while a preference for English (*More English than Swedish plus Only English*) was found in only 25.2% of the families. The declared language practice of ‘Only English’ in child-to-child communication was the least common outcome, found in only 36 of 305 (11.8%) of the families with multiple children in this study.

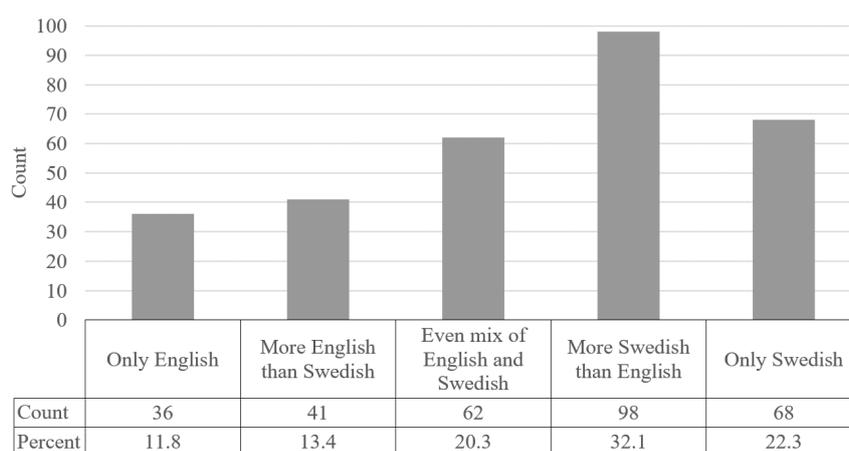


Figure 2. The declared child-to-child language practices of Swedish-English bilingual families.

A favouring of the societal language for sibling interaction correlates with Pauwels (2005: 126), who showed that in Australia, minority language speaking children seldom used that language when communicating with their siblings or peers. However, in the context

investigated in this study, there seems to be a wider variation in sibling language practices, with some version of an English-Swedish mix being reported in 65.8% of the families.

6.2 Parent-to-parent language practices

The parent-to-parent language practices reported in this study stand in stark contrast to that which was revealed in relation to child-to-child language practices. Figure 3 shows that 45.7% of parental dyads declare that they use ‘Only English’ with each other, and an additional 31% declaring that they use ‘More English than Swedish’. Language practices which favour Swedish are rather uncommon between parents in these families. Only 11.3% declare that they use either ‘More Swedish than English’ or ‘Only Swedish’.

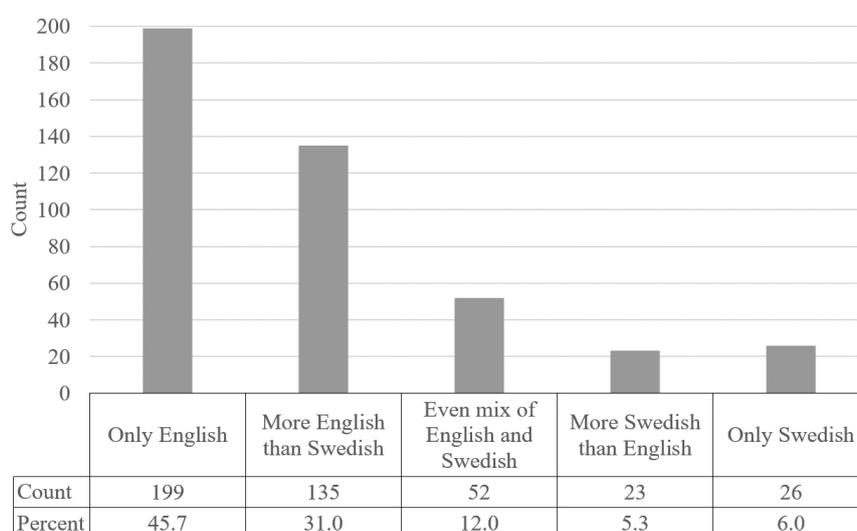


Figure 3. The declared parent-to-parent language practices of Swedish-English bilingual families.

The preference for English between parents makes sense due to the typically asymmetrical proficiency of the parents’ linguistic repertoires. Most L1 Swedish parents will be more proficient in English than the L1 English parent is in Swedish. Nearly every L1 Swedish parent will have studied English from an early age, while the L1 English parents are

unlikely to have studied Swedish until adulthood, if at all. However, this finding should not be equated with the assumption that L1 English parents lack Swedish proficiency entirely, with Boyd (1998) showing that North Americans frequently use Swedish in their everyday lives.

### *6.3 Parent-to-child language practices*

Parent-to-child language practices are closely tied to the L1 of the parent in question, as can be seen in Table 6. The most commonly declared parent-to-child language practice for L1 English speaking parents was ‘Only English’ with 58.6%, and the same pattern occurs for L1 Swedish speaking parents, where ‘Only Swedish’ occurs as the most commonly declared language practice in parent-to-child interaction at 41.9%.

Table 6. The declared parent-to-child language practices of Swedish-English bilingual families.

	English parents		Swedish parents		Combined	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Only English	256	58.6	22	5.1	278	31.9
More English than Swedish	131	30.0	31	7.1	162	18.6
Even mix of English and Swedish	30	6.9	49	11.3	79	9.1
More Swedish than English	14	3.2	150	34.6	164	18.8
Only Swedish	6	1.4	182	41.9	188	21.6
Total	437	100	434	100	871	100

A primary sociolinguistic observation here would be that of ‘native-speakerism’ or the so called ‘native speaker ideology’ (Holliday, 2006), which in this context would infer that it is the ‘native’ speaker parent who is responsible for speaking that language if the children are to be raised bilingually. This ideology is clearly reflected in the results. Although the correlation between L1 and language spoken between

parents and their children is clearly strong (precisely how strong is discussed later), it can be observed in Figure 4 that there is no symmetrical relationship between the declared practices of L1 English speaking parents and L1 Swedish speaking parents. L1 Swedish speaking parents show a greater variation in their parent-to-child language practices than do L1 English speaking parents, with the data revealing that L1 Swedish speaking parents are relatively more likely to use at least some English with their children than L1 English speaking parents are to use at least some Swedish.

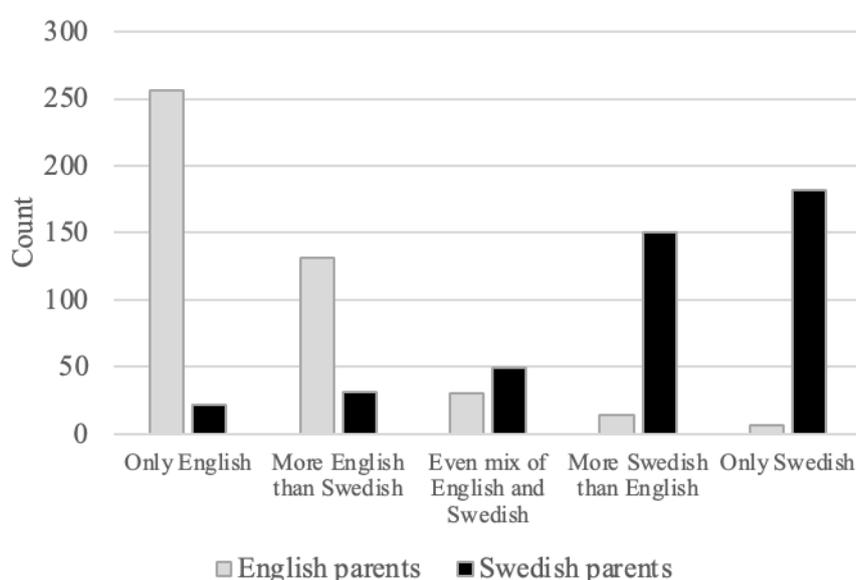


Figure 4. The declared parent-to-child language practices of Swedish-English bilingual families.

When analysing the parent-to-child language practice data in terms of the family language policies which they represent, Table 7 shows that only 30.6% of the families in this sample report that they practice a strict OPOL policy. The ‘minority language at home’ policy (i.e. English at home) was practiced by 4.2% of parents, while the ‘majority language at home’ policy (i.e. Swedish at home) is extremely rare, with less than one percent of parents declaring this as their practiced language policy. The

most commonly represented FLP is a mixed language policy in which at least one parent uses two languages in the home.

Table 7. Parent-to-child language practices as family language policy.

<b>Language policy</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
One parent one language	133	30.6
Minority language at home	18	4.2
Majority language at home	4	0.9
Other (mixed)	279	64.3
Total	434	100

The next sections present the results in relation to RQ2 by analysing the correlations between social factors and divergences in family language practices.

#### *6.4 Social factors and child-to-child language practices*

Four of the social factors investigated in this study correlated with a significant divergence in child-to-child language practices. These factors, shown in Tables 8 and 9, are the L1 parental constellation ( $p = <.001$ ), if the children in question have ever lived in an English speaking country ( $p = .004$ ), if the family have ever been involved in English speaking parent-child groups ( $p = .034$ ), and parental occupation ( $p = .042$ ). The factor with the greatest effect size ( $r = .31$ ), and thus the factor which represents the strongest relationship with child-to-child language practices, is the parental constellation, that is, if a family contains an L1 English speaking mother and an L1 Swedish speaking father or the opposite. Child-to-child language practices were relatively more likely to be towards the English end of the scale if the parental constellation contained the mother as the L1 English speaker, while they were relatively more likely to be towards the Swedish end of the scale if the mother was the L1 Swedish speaker. This result could be interpreted as children showing a preference for their mother's L1, as in Veltman (1981).

The variable with the second largest effect size ( $r = .16$ ) relates to if a family had ever lived with their children in an English speaking

country before moving to Sweden. This is a relatively common occurrence in the families in this dataset with 37.4% of the families declaring that they had previously lived in an English speaking country with their children. If a family had lived in an English speaking country previously, then the language practices between children were relatively more likely to be towards the English end of the scale, and if a family had not lived in an English speaking country previously, then the language practices between children were relatively more likely to be towards the Swedish end of the scale. The influence of past circumstances on current language practices resonates closely with Busch's (2015) concept of *Spracherleben*, the lived experience of language, with Soler and Roberts (2019) finding that lived experiences are key in understanding current family language policies. Blommaert (2010) also notes that while the object of study, language practices in this case, are situated in real time, the practices are produced by historical processes. Previous habits may have been formed in such children, influenced by the external English ecology in which they previously found themselves, and these habits have to some extent been carried into the present situation. This historically situated perspective may also be employed to help to understand the variable of involvement in parent-child English speaking groups, that is, if a family has historically participated, or currently participates, in such groups. Participation in such groups correlated with a relative preference towards the English end of the scale for child-to-child language practices ( $r = .12$ ).

The last significant finding indicated that there was a correlation between parental occupation, sorted by socioeconomic classification, and child-to-child language practices (see Table 9). A post-hoc Mann Whitney  $U$  test (Table 10) indicated that a pairwise significant result occurred between salariat occupations (i.e. professional occupations) and working class occupations ( $p = .024$ ,  $r = .16$ ). Children whose parents had salariat occupations showed a relative preference towards English in sibling interaction, while children whose parents had working class occupations showed a relative preference towards Swedish. The connection between socioeconomic status and language preference will be considered further in the next section.

Table 8. Mann Whitney *U* tests comparing predictor variables with the criterion variable of child-to-child language practices.

Predictor variable	Group (N)	Mean rank <sup>1</sup>	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	Effect size ( <i>r</i> )	Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Parental constellation	Mother (ENG) + Father (SWE) (171)	129.72	7476	-5.362	.31	<.001***
	Mother (SWE) + Father (ENG) (134)	182.71				
Children have lived in an English speaking country previously	Yes (114)	134.82	4925	-2.863	.16	.004***
	No (191)	163.85				
Involvement in parent-child English speaking groups	Yes (79)	133.22	7364	-2.124	.12	.034*
	No (221)	156.68				
Parental involvement in English speaking religious organisations	Yes (14)	190.21	1446	-1.806	.10	.071
	No (286)	148.56				
Parental marital status	Married/cohabiting (252)	146.10	4938	-1.421	.08	.155
	Divorced/separated (45)	165.26				
Frequency of visits to English speaking countries	Once or more per year (194)	142.11	8654	-1.289	.08	.198
	Less than once per year (98)	155.19				
Place of habitation: Greater Stockholm or elsewhere	Greater Stockholm (118)	143.81	9948	-0.791	.05	.429
	Rest of Sweden (178)	151.61				
Parental education level	Upper-secondary or lower (50)	160.24	5913	-0.749	.04	.454
	University education (253)	150.37				
Parental involvement in English speaking educational organisations	Yes (143)	143.92	6888	-0.683	.04	.494
	No (239)	152.18				
Number of children in a family	Two (207)	154.71	9790	-0.505	.03	.613
	Three or more (98)	149.40				
Parental involvement in English speaking cultural organisations	Yes (108)	150.02	10316	-0.074	.00	.941
	No (192)	150.77				

<sup>6</sup> A higher mean rank value indicates that a group has a relative preference towards English, while a lower mean rank value indicates that a group has a relative preference towards Swedish within a predictor variable.

Table 9. Kruskal-Wallis  $H$  tests comparing predictor variables with the criterion variable of child-to-child language practices.

Predictor variable	Group (N)	Mean rank	$H$	$df$	Sig. ( $p$ )
Parental occupation in European SES classification	Salariat (171)	138.79	6.346	2	.042*
	Intermediate (56)	128.55			
	Working class (36)	105.13			
Number of local L1 English speakers that parents are in contact with	None (48)	135.03	2.521	2	.283
	1-5 (146)	156.91			
	6+ (111)	155.63			
Place of habitation: municipality type	Large urban area (142)	144.62	0.814	2	.666
	Medium urban area (104)	149.78			
	Rural area (50)	156.71			
Age of children	0-4 (33)	130.53	2.288	4	.683
	5-9 (102)	134.02			
	10-14 (65)	149.78			
	15-19 (55)	135.65			
	20-24 (19)	131.58			

Table 10. Mann Whitney  $U$  tests for pairwise group comparisons for parental occupation in European SES classification as the predictor variable and child-to-child language practices as the criterion variable.

Predictor variable	Group (N)	Mean rank	$U$	$z$	Effect size ( $r$ )	Sig. ( $p$ )
Parental occupation in Euro. SES classification	Salariat (171)	117.39	4667	-.944	.06	.345
	Intermediate (56)	108.29				
Parental occupation in Euro. SES classification	Salariat (171)	104.35	1969	-2.264	.16	.024*
	Working class (36)	79.53				
Parental occupation in Euro. SES classification	Intermediate (56)	48.68	769	-1.383	.14	.167
	Working class (36)	40.81				

### 6.5 Social factors and parent-to-child language practices

The social factor which most strongly correlated with parent-to-child language practices was that of the parents' L1 ( $r = .75$ ,  $p = <.001$ , see Table 11), which was to be expected, and has been exemplified previously in Table 6 and Figure 4. The effect size of  $r = .75$  implies that 56.3% of the variance of the criterion variable of parent-to-child

language practices is attributable to the predictor variable of parents' L1. It is therefore also implied that 43.7% of the variance in parent-to-child language practices in this sample can be attributed to variables other than the L1 of the parent. This result exemplifies the complexity of understanding language practices in the family context, and shows that these practices cannot be reasonably understood in relation to any single factor in isolation.

The predictor variables of children having lived in an English speaking country previously and parental occupation according to socioeconomic status (Table 12) were also found to have significant correlations with a divergence in parent-to-child language practices ( $p = .014$ ;  $p = .015$ ). Whereas these two variables were significant factors in relation to child-to-child language practices, in the case of children having lived in an English speaking country previously, the effect size was only  $r = .08$ , the correlation was considerably weaker than the one found in child-to-child language practices. Contrarily, parental occupation was found to correlate slightly more strongly with a parent-to-child language practices than was the case with child-to-child language practices. Moreover, Table 13 shows that a significant correlation was found not only between salariat occupations and working class occupations ( $p = .005$ ,  $r = .17$ ), but also between intermediate occupations and working class occupations ( $p = .021$ ,  $r = .20$ ). Parents with salariat and intermediate occupations were relatively more likely to declare that they use English in parent-to-child interactions. This could potentially be explained by higher socioeconomic status parents having a clearer pro-English ideology that reflects the perception that proficiency in English is associated with better job opportunities, social prestige, educational empowerment, and easier socio-economic advancement (as was found in Curdt-Christiansen, 2016). It is likely that this parental ideology found in higher socioeconomic groups, and the associated parent-to-child language practices, also influence child-to-child language practices as was seen in section 6.4.

Table 11. Mann Whitney *U* tests comparing predictor variables with the criterion variable of parent-to-child language practices.

Predictor variable	Group (N)	Mean rank	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	Effect size ( <i>r</i> )	Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Parents' first language	L1 English parents (437)	252.39	14589	-22.251	.75	<.001***
	L1 Swedish parents (434)	620.88				
Children have lived in an English speaking country previously	Yes (271)	405.67	73081	-2.462	.08	.014*
	No (600)	449.70				
Parental constellation: Swedish	Swedish mother (184)	227.74	21115	-1.553	.08	.120
	Swedish father (250)	209.96				
Parental involvement in English speaking cultural organisations	Yes (143)	204.30	18919	-1.421	.07	.155
	No (287)	221.08				
Parental education level	Upper-secondary or lower (68)	199.26	11204	-1.408	.07	.159
	University education (366)	220.89				
Parental involvement in English speaking educational organisations	Yes (80)	201.14	12851	-1.235	.06	.217
	No (350)	218.78				
Number of children	One (236)	452.54	71026	-1.218	.04	.223
	Two or more (635)	429.85				
Parental marital status	Married/cohabiting (721)	422.91	44638	-1.166	.04	.244
	Divorced/separated (132)	449.33				
Frequency of visits to English speaking countries	Once or more per year (590)	411.64	68520	-1.032	.04	.302
	Less than once per year (243)	430.02				
Involvement in parent-child English speaking groups	Yes (114)	207.89	17145	-0.822	.04	.411
	No (316)	218.24				
Parental constellation: English	English mother (252)	222.01	22551	-0.662	.03	.508
	English father (185)	214.90				
Parental involvement in English speaking religious organisations	Yes (19)	203.45	3675	-0.466	.02	.641
	No (411)	216.06				
Place of habitation: Greater Stockholm or elsewhere	Greater Stockholm (338)	423.76	85938	-0.124	.00	.902
	Rest of Sweden (511)	425.82				

Table 12. Kruskal-Wallis *H* tests comparing predictor variables with the criterion variable of parent-to-child language practices.

Predictor	Group (N)	Mean rank	<i>H</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Parental occupation in European SES classification	Salariat (235)	190.72	8.353	2	.015*
	Intermediate (84)	182.08			
	Working class (45)	145.24			
Number of children	One (236)	452.54	2.909	2	.233
	Two (436)	422.03			
	Three or more (199)	447.00			
Number of local L1 English speakers that parents are in contact with	None (175)	435.29	1.980	2	.372
	1-5 (401)	447.35			
	6+ (295)	420.99			
Age of children	0-4 (227)	408.43	2.004	4	.735
	5-9 (258)	399.67			
	10-14 (142)	410.96			
	15-19 (120)	378.95			
	20-24 (52)	383.46			
Place of habitation: municipality type	Large urban area (430)	429.23	0.447	2	.800
	Medium urban area (285)	423.98			
	Rural area (134)	413.60			

Table 13. Mann Whitney *U* tests for pairwise group comparisons for parental occupation in European SES classification as the predictor variable and parent-to-child language practices as the criterion variable.

Predictor variable	Group (N)	Mean rank	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	Effect size ( <i>r</i> )	Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Parental occupation in Euro. SES classification	Salariat (235)	162.16	9362	-0.749	.04	.454
	Intermediate (84)	153.96				
Parental occupation in Euro. SES classification	Salariat (235)	146.56	4098	-2.808	.17	.005*
	Working class (45)	112.60				
Parental occupation in Euro. SES classification	Intermediate (84)	70.63	1501	-2.314	.20	.021*
	Working class (45)	56.14				

### 6.6 Factors which influence parent-to-parent language practices

Parent-to-parent language practices correlate most strongly with marital status ( $p = <.001$ ,  $r = .17$ ) and parental constellation ( $p = .10$ ,  $r = .12$ ). Married or cohabiting parents are relatively more likely to use Swedish,

while divorced or separated couples are relatively more like to use English. This correlation may occur because those L1 English speakers who live with their partner and children are likely to be exposed to more Swedish in their current home environment (due to the use of Swedish by their partner and children), which may socialise them into using more Swedish with their partner. When examining the variable of parental constellation, a preference was found towards the mother's L1. That is to say that in couples where the mother is an L1 Swedish speaker, the parent-to-parent language practices are relatively more likely to contain Swedish, and the opposite for when the mother is an L1 English speaker. This indicates that the mother's language is not only a stronger variable for understanding child-to-child practices, but also parent-to-parent practices in this context.

Parent-to-parent language practices correlated less strongly with family-external factors when compared with parent-to-child and child-to-child language practices. In fact, no family-external factors showed a significant correlation with parent-to-parent language practices (Table 14 and 15). This could indicate that parent-to-parent language practices are less permeable and less susceptible to change, with only life-changing events (such as divorce or separation) likely to induce divergence.

Table 14. Mann Whitney *U* tests comparing predictor variables with the criterion variable of parent-to-parent language practices.

Predictor variable	Group (N)	Mean rank	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	Effect size ( <i>r</i> )	Sig. ( <i>p</i> )
Marital status	Married/cohabiting (362)	206.67	9111	-3.459	.17	<.001***
	Divorced/separated (67)	260.01				
Parental constellation	Mother (ENG) + Father (SWE) (250)	230.45	20012	-2.571	.12	.010**
	Mother (SWE) + Father (ENG) (185)	201.17				
Involvement in parent-child English speaking groups	Yes (114)	201.14	16375	-1.440	.07	.150
	No (314)	219.35				
Parental involvement in English speaking religious organisations	Yes (19)	241.29	3376	-1.033	.05	.302
	No (409)	213.26				
Frequency of visits to English speaking countries	Once or more per year (295)	205.68	170115	-0.798	.04	.425
	Less than once per year (121)	215.38				
Place of habitation: Greater Stockholm or elsewhere	Greater Stockholm (168)	214.40	21185	-0.277	.01	.782
	Rest of Sweden (256)	211.25				
Parental involvement in English speaking cultural organisations	Yes (142)	212.32	19996	-0.275	.01	.783
	No (286)	215.58				
Parental involvement in English speaking educational organisations	Yes (80)	212.64	13771	-0.160	.01	.873
	No (348)	214.93				
Parental education level	Upper-secondary or lower (66)	218.61	11939	-0.159	.01	.873
	University education (366)	216.12				

Table 15. Kruskal-Wallis  $H$  tests comparing predictor variables with the criterion variable of parent-to-parent language practices.

Predictor variable	Group (N)	Mean rank	$H$	$df$	Sig. ( $p$ )
Parental occupation in European SES classification	Salariat (234)	187.20	2.183	2	.336
	Intermediate (83)	168.88			
	Working class (45)	179.21			
Age of children	0-4 (114)	205.55	4.232	4	.376
	5-9 (219)	190.33			
	10-14 (71)	202.68			
	15-19 (60)	200.12			
	20-24 (26)	236.90			
Number of local L1 English speakers that parents are in contact with	None (87)	222.25	1.654	2	.437
	1-5 (201)	223.56			
	6+ (147)	207.89			
Number of children	One (118)	219.70	0.833	2	.659
	Two (218)	213.39			
	Three or more (99)	226.11			
Place of habitation: municipality type	Large urban area (214)	208.08	0.659	2	.719
	Medium urban area (143)	216.35			
	Rural area (67)	218.40			

### 7. Discussion and Conclusion

Having examined the relationship between social variables and stated language practices, it should be noted that the factors investigated in this study did not affect all language practice dyads to the same degree. The mother's L1 correlated strongest with child-to-child language practices, followed by parent-to-parent language practices, while it had a non-significant correlation with parent-to-child language practices, for example. This, along with the finding that child-to-child and parent-to-parent language practices bear little resemblance to each other in English-Swedish bilingual families, shows that the often polycentric reality of language use in bi-national families need to be taken into account in conceptualisations of what constitutes a home language. The difference between parent-to-parent language practices and child-to-child language practices also allows for a greater understanding of language shift (Fishman, 1964), which can be seen occurring in real time in this data. However, this language shift is likely just a generational shift from English as a primary home language in many cases, not an indication that

the English language will cease to be acquired and used by future generations. This shift is made on the assumption of these children forming families with other primarily Swedish speaking individuals, but this will certainly not be the case in every instance, as increased globalisation and migration possibilities make future transnational families all the more likely.

Language use in child-to-child interaction favoured Swedish, and it is therefore likely that many of these children internally consider Swedish to be a more suitable language for peer interaction, despite a preference for English amongst their parents. This divergence shows that children's language practices are not merely a copy of their parents', but shaped by interactions and contexts in which they participate (Strauss, 1992). The preference of Swedish for sibling interaction can be analysed through the lens of child agency (Smith-Christmas, 2020), and through the consideration of the external environment on the children's language ideologies. A societal ideology which promotes using Swedish in peer communication (e.g. at school) has clearly affected the language practices of the children in this study, while the children's agency can be seen through their adoption of language practices which differ to what they experience in the home. The findings discussed here exemplify the challenges for heritage language maintenance internationally. Despite inhabiting an encouraging sociolinguistic environment with two high status languages (Cabau, 2009), the children in this study nevertheless seem to be drifting towards a preference for the societal language. The implication for international linguistic minority communities may be that this societal language dominance inevitably leads to language shift. The English language in Sweden is unlikely to relinquish its position in greater Swedish society any time soon, but it may indeed surrender its position as a home language in future generations of the families who took part in this study.

Although socioeconomic status in terms of parental occupation was found to have a significant correlation with language practices in both child-to-child and parent-to-child dyads, education level and place of inhabitation showed no significant correlations. The correlation between parental education and FLP has been shown in several studies, so its lack of influence here is perhaps unexpected. This finding exemplifies the context specific nature of FLP research, especially as regards the influence of the greater society in which families find themselves

embedded. It is likely that for a context-specific sociocultural reason, education level and place of habitation play a limited role in language choice in these families. Although no correlation between declared language practices and parental education level was found in this study, this research instrument cannot determine if parental education level (or other socioeconomic factors) influence how parents use language in these families. Research into parenting styles has found that working-class and middle-class parenting styles differ, and the language used to implement parenting styles also differs according to class stratification (Lareau, 2003). Future studies may wish to take a micro-interactional approach to explore *how* language is used in such families rather than simply *which* language is used (cf. Abreu Fernandes, 2019).

The present study has shown the potential for understanding FLP in relation to a variety of factors. The results further reveal the complex situation underpinning this relationship. Although several different social factors were found to have significant correlations with language practices, most of these factors are only able to account for a limited amount of the variance found. Many previous studies have been quick to attribute FLPs to a small number of variables, but the results of this study show the limitations of such a narrow approach. Future studies should endeavour to employ research designs which allow for the collection of diverse data that can allow the researcher to piece together the underlying puzzle of any FLP. Indeed, this study itself only gives part of the FLP puzzle. This study has not investigated, for example, home literacy or relative language proficiency, as these were not necessarily best examined with the present research design; the study is an example of how a large-scale quantitative design is able to collect data from a vast number of participants from disparate geographical areas which can then be employed in a way different from most FLP studies. This study is not suggesting that this quantitative approach should replace typical qualitative approaches in the field, but rather can be combined with such approaches in mixed method research designs in order to collect diverse datatypes to be used when trying to understand FLP in a particular context.

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