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Parents as Agents of ›Imported Bilingualism‹

Arguing for Two New Concepts for Further Development of the Typology of Bilingual Families

This paper argues for the need to introduce two new concepts: Imported Bilingualism and Academic Monolingualism. The aim is twofold: firstly, by arguing that the positioning of languages as a type of capital can facilitate a shift of low value attitudes towards the types of bilingualism that stem from the necessity of migration. Secondly, the positioning of languages as an importable type of capital provides direct links with Bourdieu's theories, which illuminate the reasons for low value attitudes towards own languages in minority communities. In conclusion: the Healthy Linguistic Diet as an approach with the potential to overcome challenges is explored.

1. Introduction

In a recent tutorial with a doctoral student the need for a new concept presented itself while discussing her focus: parents who do not live bilingual lives themselves, but have an interest in languages and want their children to grow up as bilinguals. In the proposal, the term used was ›non-native bilingual families‹. In my own work I avoid using negative definitions, meaning defining something by not being something else. In addition to being a negative definition, ›non-native bilingual‹ also imposes the discourse of deficiency, which should be avoided in education too. Therefore, the title of the proposal which included the term ›non-native bilingual families‹ challenged me instantly to offer an alternative ›positive definition‹.

In the search of literature for relevant concepts, I have identified that Garcia offered a relevant classification in the analysis of the US context.[1] Garcia uses the concepts of ›natural‹

1 Garcia: *Bilingualism in the United States.*

and ›learned‹ bilingualism to distinguish between bilingualism which occurs in contexts where languages come into contact and are learned ›naturally‹ and when a second language is learned in a formal situation, as in schools. Garcia concludes that ›natural‹ bilingualism in the US is linked to immigrant groups, and therefore is seen as controversial, and linked to feelings of being foreign and disloyal in some way to the US, whereas learned bilingualism is seen as ›individual enrichment‹.

Although I agree with Garcia in terms of identifying migration and immigrant groups as key factors which lead to certain types of bilingualism being controversial and devalued by mainstream society and consequently also by minority groups themselves, as theorised by Bourdieu,[2] I argue that ›natural‹ and ›learned‹ bilingualism are problematic as concepts for several reasons. Having worked with a range of community groups living in a diaspora[3] I have witnessed that parents in such situations have to work hard in order for their children to maintain and further develop their home language. Also, if children from such families do not attend a complementary or mother tongue school, they are not very likely to develop literacy in their home language.

During my visit to University of California Los Angeles (2023) I attended a lecture for students of the Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian languages – out of six students taking these languages, five were from families who immigrated into the US during the conflict in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. These students now learn ab initio languages which are in fact their home languages, since, where Garcia suggests that ›natural bilingualism‹ will be occurring, it has failed to happen in their cases. In my consultations with these students they shared that they felt at a loss for not having developed skills in their home languages, which they now study with a lot of effort as foreign languages. Therefore, although immigrant groups do live with in contact with their languages, as Garcia outlines, it is often hard to motivate children to learn and use their home language when all their schooling and much of their free time happen in English (or other host country language).

On the other hand, for adults who immigrate at an advanced age, natural bilingualism can also fail, since it can be extremely hard to learn another language at a late stage in life. I have encountered adults who, despite attending language courses, were not able to develop suitable competencies in the language of their host country. Drawing on my experience, I can only see ›natural bilingualism‹ happening to immigrants within a certain age

2 Bourdieu: *Language and Symbolic Power*.

3 Mehmedbegovic: *Researching attitudes and values*.

bracket: young adults and adults of working age, who have acquired compulsory education and higher levels of education in their home language, whose home language is well developed and secure, and they are then in the situation to live in another country where they want to study and work. They will therefore look to acquire their second language as efficiently as possible, again with effort and often by attending language courses, such as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses for adults in the UK. Therefore ›natural bilingualism‹ as a concept is more problematic the closer one looks at real-life examples, especially in immigrant communities.

Equally, the concept ›learned bilingualism‹ is problematic in other ways. It is misleading, since it is used to mean merely learning a foreign language, rather than learning how to be bilingual. Bilingualism is a consequence of using two languages, not something that can be learned in its own right. Although Garcia states that ›learned‹ refers to learning another language in a formal situation, that does not help one understand how this proposed new way of conceptualising foreign language learning further develops our insights into hierarchies and complexities amongst different types of bilingualism and bilingual families. Why do we need another term such as ›learned bilingualism‹? How does it add to our understanding of bilingualism and its typology?

More recently, a concept of ›intentional bilingualism‹ has been proposed by Hurajova.[4] Although ›intentional bilingualism‹ addresses the phenomenon of bilingualism as a parental choice, I argue that it is not specific enough, since ›intentional bilingualism‹ can also be something one chooses for oneself, as in the example above, students in the US who make such choices to compensate for lost opportunities of acquiring languages at home.

I therefore wish to return to my initial point that there is a need for a new concept to be added to the typology of bilingualism and bilingual families. I propose the use of a new term: ›Imported Bilingualism‹, for the following reasons: theorising this under a researched phenomenon, where parents choose to bring up their children bilingually without any pressure or need to do with migration or context, as ›Imported Bilingualism‹ rather than ›non-native bilingual families‹ or ›learned bilingualism‹ or ›intentional bilingualism‹ can more accurately define the phenomenon in focus with the link to language(s) as a type of capital and resource. In the continuation, my aim is to argue that the positioning of language(s) as capital can then facilitate a shift of low value attitudes towards the types of bilingualism that stem from the necessity of migration, linked with poverty and under-privileged communities.

4 Hurajova: *The Phenomenon of Bilingualism in Slovakia*.

2. What can this new term do for the wider field of researching and theorising bilingual families?

Throughout my career in London (since 1992), as a teacher, ethnic minority consultant for the City of Westminster local authority and researcher, I have been working with immigrant and ethnic minority communities. Learners from these contexts are identified by schools as speakers of English as an Additional Language (EAL). In the UK, English is positioned as an additional language in order to emphasise that these learners have another language(s) at home and therefore English is additional to their existing linguistic repertoire. This is considered essential by educators championing the importance of seeing these learners not only through the lens of what they cannot do in English, but also by being aware of what they can do in their home language(s). One important principle of good practice with EAL learners is to facilitate assessments in home language(s) in order to understand the development and knowledge these learners have in language/s other than English.[5] In the UK context, bilingualism is considered as a subtype of multilingualism.[6]

In literature in the field of psycholinguistics and other related disciplines there are studies exploring the differences between bilingualism and other types of multilingualism, involving three or more languages. This paper will not be exploring these differences since its focus is on the UK and international schools, where EAL is used as an umbrella term that includes all different types of bi/multilingualism. In terms of the national and school policies and practices discussed, there is no differentiation between bilingual and multilingual learners.

It is important also to emphasise that the term ›home language‹ is used in the place of ›mother tongue‹, which is gender biased and singles out the role of the mother in children's language development, whereas ›home language‹ is inclusive of both parents, grandparents, siblings, wider family and care givers, since all these family members have a role to play in supporting a child to develop their language and, in the case of migration, maintain the language from the country of origin.[7] I consider it important that we use an inclusive term which rightly acknowledges the role of all family members in supporting a child in developing and maintaining what in the US context is referred to as a ›heritage language‹.[8] Also, in transnational families parents

5 Cable: *Developing a bilingual pedagogy*.
6 Ibid.
7 Mehmedbegovic: *What every policy maker needs to know*.
8 Beaudrie/Fairclough: *Spanish as a Heritage Language*.

come from different linguistic backgrounds. For example, if the parents are a Croatian father and UK mother, it will depend on the father and his side of the family to facilitate the use of Croatian in order for children in such a family to grow up bilingual in English and Croatian, and therefore the ›mother tongue‹ concept for such cases of bilingualism presents itself as simply inaccurate.

In my career I have encountered a range of different profiles of EAL learners: children who are highly proficient in their home language in terms of oracy and literacy (recent immigrants from Ukraine); children who are highly proficient in terms of oracy in their home language and English, but have no literacy in their home language, their literacy is entirely in English (Sylheti speakers born in the UK); or a learner from Brazil who is relearning Portuguese at the age of 16, because her parents decided to speak in English only when they emigrated to the UK, when she was five, and her wish to refresh and further learn Portuguese comes from her own awareness that Portuguese is important for connecting with her wider family and culture and in terms of the cognitive advantages of bilingualism.[9]

The common feature in all these different EAL profiles is that bilingualism was a necessity. For families fleeing the war in Ukraine and being given sanctuary in the UK, learning English and becoming bilingual was not a planned or chosen family language policy, but presented itself as an unexpected and immediate necessity, a lifeline in a period of extreme hardship and parental fear for the existence of their children. For the Sylheti speakers born in London and the Portuguese speaker relocating at a young age from Brazil, bilingualism was perhaps not so forcefully thrown at them by historical circumstances, but nevertheless it was a necessity for fitting into the UK environment and education. In the case of the Brazilian learner, it was reported that parental anxiety about schooling in English led to the decision to abandon the home language, Portuguese.[10] Although such decisions are based on best parental intentions, but without being informed by relevant research and good practice, they lead to language loss and subtractive types of bilingualism.[11] In my research studies I have encountered adults who reflect on these same processes in their families.[12] As well settled adults and successful professionals in the UK, they report feelings of being robbed of their culture and heritage by switching to English only in the UK.

9 Mehmedbegovic/Hanoman: *Equality in Action*.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Mehmedbegovic: *A study in attitudes*.

I would like to argue that parents who make the decision to switch to an English only policy in their homes, when they arrive in the UK or US, are influenced by the deficit models of bilingualism, a lack of guidance from education and health professionals on the importance of building on and developing further their home language, and anxiety regarding desired education success in English. I would also like to argue that being aware of the Imported Bilingualism choice some parents make, especially English-speaking parents, would support migrant, ethnic minority and indigenous families in seeing the value of having a bilingual family policy and continuing to use their language of origin.

3. The long-term dominance of the deficit model of bilingualism in the UK

UK EAL specialists have been battling misperceptions of bilingualism as a special need, a problem in the classroom and a hindrance to academic success and inclusion.[13] In public political discourse, David Blunkett, Minister of Education in 2002, made a landmark comment in the national press by advising parents to speak English at home in order to »overcome the schizophrenia that bedevils generational relationships« caused by the use of different languages at home.[14] Contemplating the impact on parents and communities of hearing a Minister of Education advise the use of English only on national TV caused a big outcry from researchers in the field looking to provide evidence on the benefits of bilingualism and expose the outstanding inadequacy of linking bilingualism with psychiatric terminology and extreme religious discourse, by categorising it as bedevilling, associated as of the devil or devil's work.

The debate in the papers, to which I also contributed,[15] continued at the time over several months, but we academics could not even begin to hope that our activism in the public domain had ›cured‹ the deficit model of bilingualism magnified by Blunkett's comments. In fact, my study with leading professionals and politicians in England and Wales provided further evidence and confirmation that the types of bilingualism and home languages used by under privileged groups are seen as of no use or interest

13 Mehmedbegovic: *Miss, who needs the languages of immigrants?*
14 As quoted in Mehmedbegovic: *A study in attitudes.*
15 Ibid.

to the wider community.[16] The following anonymised quote from an interviewed conservative MP, who was at the time and currently still is high up in the political hierarchy, captures with accuracy the painful reality many bilinguals repeatedly experience:

> Bengali has no value. It does not matter to this country, if people speak Bengali or not, in terms of our culture. Bengali could matter, if the Indian economy grows and it can be used for business purposes. Welsh and Gaelic are home languages. There is more political imperative and more political clout behind preserving those languages as a part of our own cultural identity.[17]

There is a dichotomy of ›our culture‹ and ›our business discourse‹ in this quote – for business purposes every language can become an asset, if market forces provide opportunities for its use. Mandarin is an excellent example of the upward mobility of a language linked to the economic boom of China. Also, showing political support for Welsh and Gaelic is a recent strategy influenced by the greater political autonomy of Wales and the revival of the Welsh language supported by the Welsh Assembly, formed in 1998.[18]

One does not have to look hard for evidence that not much has changed in the political arena. In October 2023, Suella Braverman, serving then as the UK Home Secretary and on an official visit to the US, gave a speech in which she stated that multiculturalism is a »misguided dogma« and »has failed because it allowed people to come to our society and live parallel lives«.[19] Can Braverman be referring to the mothers of Sylheti speaking children whom I got to know through my research? Women who never had the opportunity to go to school in their country of origin, who are housewives and mothers in large families in East London with no opportunities to learn English or literacy in their home language.

An example I would like to highlight: Berger Primary School in Hackney, East London, where I worked as an adviser (2014–2018). This school organised Maths lessons in Turkish for children of Turkish origin in order to improve their results in Maths. Soon the headteacher at the time, Dr Karen Coulthard, was approached by the mothers and grandmothers of these children, who were asking to have lessons in Turkish and English. Once the lessons were organised, I interviewed the participants.[20] Five

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 105 (conservative MP, interview data).

18 *Senned Cymru / Welsh Parliament*. <https://senedd.wales>.

19 Wingate: *Braverman*.

20 D. Mehmedbegovic, K. Coulthard: *Engaging with bilingualism in a primary London school: First language initiative as a tool for school improvement*. Conference presentation. 3rd LINEE Conference: *Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Space and Time*, Dubrovnik (Croatia) 2014.

mothers and two grandmothers reported that this was their first time to have an opportunity to go to school, to learn how to read and write. They were tearful when expressing appreciation for the headteacher for making that happen. I was very moved to witness such a key moment in their lives. Braverman's statements made me question if these bilingual women really failed the UK or Europe in any way. Although the ›parallel lives‹ description exposes obvious issues with integration, the reasons are often found in lack of opportunities to learn English, find a job and participate in the wider community life, rather than their lack of interest in integrating. I would like to argue that politicians and researchers should focus on exploring who or what in the system has failed these women, since they are illiterate in the 21st century.

The fact that bilingualism in UK mainstream education has been linked to disadvantaged communities, such as above, often communities living on the poverty line and in need of welfare support, has resulted in categorising ›bilingualism as a problem‹, to use Ruiz's categorisation of bilingualism.[21] In my experience as a consultant working with schools on improving achievement among ethnic minorities, this was manifested by EAL children often being placed on the Special Needs (SEN) register and in low ability groups. This is an issue which has been highlighted also in a landmark publication which was a joint effort of UK EAL specialists.[22]

I would like to argue, based on my research, that all these elements have contributed to a powerful and dominant deficit model of bilingualism in the UK. In my cycle of studies with bilingual parents, headteachers of schools with large percentages of bilingual children, leading professionals and politicians in England and Wales[23] there is a prominent language hierarchy, reflected in the collected data by the low values attached to the bilingualism of immigrant communities and their languages, such as Bengali, Sylheti, Bosnian, Portuguese. On the other hand, bilingualism in languages which are linked to affluent communities and which are taught as high-status languages in schools, such as French, German, Spanish, Italian and, more recently, Mandarin too, are seen as a resource.[24]

Since 2017, London has the first and only bilingual English-Mandarin school in Europe: Kensington Wade School, which uses English and Mandarin in a 50-50% ratio and accepts pupils whose families are not Mandarin

21 Ruíz: *Orientations in Language Planning*.

22 Cable (ed.): *Developing a bilingual pedagogy*.

23 See References (Mehmedbegovic 2008, 2009, 2011, 2018, 2022).

24 British Council: *Language Trends England 2023*. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/language-trends-england-2023>.

users.[25] According to Kensington Wade's leaders, who shared with me their insights during a school visit in 2023, parents who do not have a direct family link with Mandarin choose to send their children to this school in order to learn a language that will be useful for their future careers. My suggestion is that it will be useful to categorise such cases as Imported Bilingualism, to identify that there are parents willing to pay for private education in order for their children to become bilingual in a language of their informed and considered choice. By making a conscious decision to ›import‹ another language into their family dynamics, they recognise this other language and consequent bilingualism as assets that they want their children to acquire. In this case, bilingualism is positioned as a mark of privilege, affluence and choice, not as a problem, burden and necessity caused by migration.

4. An example to illustrate Imported Bilingualism versus Deficit Model of Bilingualism

My example comes from an international school in the US. I will therefore provide a brief overview of the key statistics and factors shaping the attitudes to bilingualism in the US, followed by the insights gained in this school.

4.1. Context

The number of bilingual people in the US is on a significant and steady increase. According to the U.S. Census Bureau report, »the number of people in the US who spoke a language other than English at home nearly tripled from 23.1 million (about 1 in 10) in 1980 to 67.8 million (almost 1 in 5) in 2019. At the same time, the number of people who spoke only English also increased, growing by approximately one-fourth from 187.2 million in 1980 to 241 million in 2019.«[26] Spanish speakers are the largest linguistic minority group with around 42 million speakers, although the Hispanic population is much bigger, estimated at 62.6 million, or 18.9% of the total population.

Based on the difference in the number of Spanish speakers and those of Hispanic origin which stands at over 20 million, an informed guess can be made that for over 20 million Hispanic people ›natural bilingualism‹, after Garcia,[27] failed to happen. These 20 million plus people of Hispanic

25 *Kensigton Wade School*. <https://www.kensingtonwade.com>.

26 *Language Use*. <https://www.census.gov>.

27 Garcia: *Bilingualism in the United States*.

origin living in the US probably never learned Spanish or they lost their home language by prioritising English or switching to ›English only‹ family language policies. Also, it is important to highlight that not everybody who identifies as a Spanish speaker is also literate in Spanish, important in terms of receiving the Seal of Biliteracy education award,[28] and for career opportunities that require biliteracy.

According to the same Census (2019), a third (33%) of Spanish speakers did not graduate from high school, the highest percentage when compared with speakers of the other four largest language groups other than English: Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Arabic. It needs to be taken into consideration that these types of statistics, available in the public domain, can influence expectations of academic achievements for individuals from the relevant groups in education and also later in terms of their profiling on the labour market, as the studies referenced in the continuation have shown.

Considering the positioning of bilingualism in education policy and practice in the US, one has to acknowledge that there is a high level of complexity caused by the fact that each of 50 US states can shape their own language policies. Such a complex system has resulted in what US academics have identified as a ›highly polarised‹ education landscape.[29] California, as the state with the highest proportion of Spanish speakers, 40% of its population, introduced The Seal of Biliteracy award,[30] which is presented to students who can demonstrate full proficiency in two or more languages upon high school graduation. This award was introduced in 2011, and currently 45 US states offer it. According to the evaluations, the criteria used vary in different states and the lack of federal funding is not helping its status and implementation.[31] Currently, to obtain the Seal of Biliteracy in California,

> a student must show proficiency in both English and another language. In a language other than English a student must: gain a score of three or higher on an Advanced Placement exam or a score of four or more on the International Baccalaureate (IB) exam [...]. In English: they must complete all English language arts classes required for graduation with a GPA of 2.0 or better, and they must meet or exceed the English language arts portion of California's standardised test in 11th grade.[32]

In 2022, almost 50,000 students were able to earn this recognition in California. The organisation Californians Together, who initiated the Seal

28 *The Seal of Biliteracy*. <https://sealofbiliteracy.org>.

29 Bybee et al.: *An Overview of U.S. Bilingual Education*.

30 Ibid.

31 Davin et al.: *The Seal of Biliteracy*.

32 *The High School State Seal of Biliteracy*. <https://sealofbiliteracy.org/steps/3-define-criteria-granting-awards/high-school-state-seal-biliteracy>.

of Biliteracy and who lobby on behalf of language minorities, state on their website that currently, in compulsory education in California, there are 1.3 million English learners/bilingual learners, which is 25 % of its school population.

Subtirelu et al. have published an analysis of the way the Seal of Biliteracy is being implemented.[33] Their analysis highlights the following issues: English native speakers studying foreign languages are at an advantage in terms of being awarded it, and schools with a higher percentage of ethnic minority students and low-income families are less likely to participate in it. The learners identified here as being at an advantage in terms of being awarded the Seal of Biliteracy are learners and families who fit the suggested category: Imported Bilingualism.

4.2. Insights from a private international school

This school was founded in the 1980s in a US community with a high proportion of Spanish speakers. The school was the vision of local families and leaders who wanted a school focusing on language learning as a skill and also as a key to cultural understanding, where diversity is welcomed.

In 2016 I was invited by the leadership team to spend a week on their campus, gaining insights into their practice and advising them on the next steps regarding their bilingual programmes. I was also tasked with providing professional development for teachers and advisory sessions for parents and governors. In agreement with the leadership team, opportunities were organised for me to engage with the students directly in focus discussion groups and to interview several governors and parents, as a way of consulting key stakeholders in order to inform my recommendations.

The participants were chosen by the leadership team. One to one exploratory interviews with four parents started by asking the participants to share their reasons for selecting the bilingual programme for their children or opting out of it and asking them to share examples of supporting their children to develop bilingual skills. Individual interviews developed in different directions depending on ethnic and linguistic background and immigration status. Interviews with six governors varied even more since some of them had been involved with the school over several decades and had seen attitudes to bilingualism and languages shift over time, which led to the exploration of a wider social climate in the area. In five focus discussion groups, pupils shared their experiences and discussed what bilingualism

33 Subtirelu et al.: *Recognising* Whose *Bilingualism?*

meant to them, what vision they had for their future, and how they saw their languages playing a part in it. The data collected was analysed thematically according to the relevance for school and classroom policies and practice.

The school runs a bilingual English-Spanish programme from early years provision to Grade 12, open to everybody interested regardless of any previous exposure to Spanish. The school also supports other home languages through their Heritage Language Program, available in the primary school for speakers of Arabic, Dutch, Korean and Portuguese. Teachers on the heritage programme are native speakers, who teach an inquiry-based curriculum, with a strong emphasis on developing speaking skills. For speakers of other home languages, support is available for online self-study courses and assessments.

In terms of my experience of working with international schools in a variety of contexts – the UK, Switzerland, Brazil, China, Dubai and Singapore – this school has invested extra efforts and resources, to support all their learners to become bilingual and to further develop the languages they use at home with their families. The intake of this international school has consistently been a balanced mixture of international students and students from local families, English and Spanish speaking.

The insights gained led me to identify that something unique was happening there. This phenomenon I classify as an example of Imported Bilingualism versus the Deficit Model of Bilingualism. This clear dichotomy of contrasting attitudes and values attached to bilingualism which involves the same combination of languages, in this case English and Spanish, first presented itself in the interviews with parents and governors, who reported that many parents, who were native Spanish speakers and used Spanish at home with their children, decided not to enrol their children in the English-Spanish bilingual programme. The parents who were opting for this programme were in fact monolingual American English speakers. In my experience of working with bilingual families and learners in the UK and EU, this was the first time that I came across a context in which the same combination of languages was valued differently. At the same point in time, in the same school community, Spanish as a language offered by the school as additional to English was valued by monolingual English-speaking parents as desirable for their children to learn, while the bilingual Spanish-English-speaking parents were opting for a monolingual English programme and therefore denying their children, who used conversational everyday Spanish, to develop academic proficiency in Spanish.[34]

34 After Cummins: *Bilingual Education*.

Parents whose children attended the bilingual English-Spanish programme shared with me their anxiety in regards to not being able to help their children with homework or other activities in Spanish. They also talked about the strategies they used at home to show enthusiasm for learning Spanish, like watching TV together in Spanish with subtitles in English, reading bilingual English-Spanish books, as well as making an effort to learn some Spanish.[35]

These examples demonstrate how a language gets imported into the family dynamics and that, for parents who opt for the bilingual programme, bilingual learning is not something that only happens for their children in school, but an important element of it also happens at home regardless of parental monolingualism in English. In fact, it is evident from these examples that such parents are willing to learn some Spanish too.

The interviewed parents highlighted how much they appreciated my session on the cognitive advantages of bilingualism. It helped them feel reassured to have chosen the bilingual programme for their children by being aware of the wider benefits of bilingualism, such as better focus on task, enhanced academic achievement across the curriculum, and the physical and functional brain enhancement that bilingualism brings.[36] Sharing the cognitive benefits of bilingualism with all the stakeholders in education – learners, parents, teachers, school leaders, inspectors and policy makers – is one of the key principles of my Healthy Linguistic Diet approach, outlined below.

A Spanish speaking school governor brought to my attention that many Spanish speaking parents in this school community, who were recent immigrants, did not want their children to attend the English-Spanish bilingual pathway. Contrary to the expectations that every bilingual parent would welcome the opportunity for their child to use their home language and develop academic proficiency in it, these parents were actively choosing not to give that opportunity to their children. The interviewed governor offered her insights that recent immigrant parents viewed Spanish as an integral part of being profiled as belonging to Latino communities, which they wanted to avoid. They wanted their children to focus on learning English and achieving well in English. One mother, when asked why she did not choose the English-Spanish bilingual pathway for her child, replied: »We speak Spanish at home, that is enough, my child will pick up Spanish that way. In school she needs to focus on English«.[37]

35 Dina Mehmedbegovic: Field notes, USA School visit report (2016).

36 Bak/Mehmedbegovic: *Towards an interdisciplinary lifetime approach*.

37 Dina Mehmedbegovic: Field notes, USA School visit report (2016).

This parental choice of educating children in English only is actually selecting what I argue should be classified as ›Academic Monolingualism in English‹, meaning that, despite the fact that these learners will retain some use of Spanish throughout their lives, they will never have the opportunity to gain academic language proficiency in Spanish.[38] They will most likely not gain even basic literacy in Spanish, and the lack of academic literacy in their own language will disqualify them not only from gaining the Seal of Biliteracy, but also from being able to apply for any professional jobs which require bilingual skills.

5. Discussion

In a study exploring the value assigned to Spanish-English bilingualism on the US labour market, it has been identified that Spanish-English bilingualism is required for less lucrative positions. It is argued that »a penalty is associated with Spanish-English bilingualism in which positions listing such language requirements advertise lower wages than observationally similar positions« resulting in the US Latino workforce being assigned less value on the labour market.[39] This study echoes the findings of a study done a decade earlier by Cortina et al.,[40] in which a negative correlation between bilingualism and income for all occupation categories in public services was identified, where the expectation was that bilingualism in English and Spanish would be useful and valued. The authors see these findings as concerning and suggest that these differences in earnings result from discriminating against Latino profiles.

In the light of these studies, it seems that Spanish speaking parents select monolingualism in English over bilingualism in Spanish and English in order to protect their children from the disadvantage that Latino profiling may bring. Although it cannot be claimed that the parents in this community are familiar with these studies supporting their choice of English Academic Monolingualism, their choice must be informed by some knowledge in the community which is driving this trend.

In order to make sense of this phenomenon, it needs to be theorised based on Bourdieu's theory of misrecognition,[41] which is about understand-

38 After Cummins: *Bilingual Education*.
39 Subtirelu: *Raciolinguistic ideology*.
40 Cortina et al.: *The Effects of Bilingualism*.
41 Bourdieu: *Language and Symbolic Power*.

ing that minority groups internalise indicators in wider society that their cultural and linguistic capital is of less value and therefore it is natural to replace it with a language and culture of higher status. Minority groups, in this case parents who opt out of the bilingual programme, are in fact supporting themselves this process of misrecognition, which eventually leads, if not to complete language loss, in this case Spanish, then to English Academic Monolingualism, or to use Bourdieu's concept: Symbolic Violence.

The debate arguing for the need to introduce a new term is best situated within the field of Family Language Policies (FLP). In literature, King and Fogle[42] provide a historical overview of FLP as a relatively new field, defined as »language choice and language use at home, between family members«.[43] They position FLP as an interdisciplinary field with roots in sociolinguistics, anthropology and psychology. They emphasise FLP as a function of ›parental ideologies‹ and provide the following list as factors that will influence FLP: the languages parents use, migration, the language of schooling and the language of the wider community. This list covers factors which are given by the context or circumstances, such as migration.

My argument is that in addition there are families where bilingualism is ›imported‹, neither as a contextual demand, nor as a consequence of migration, but as a parental choice. Based on my involvement with bilingual families, I identify examples of such choices made out of appreciation for another language and culture, a wish to enrich the developmental elements and an intention to provide the conditions for children to benefit from growing up bilingually.

Luo et al. highlight that »there is a critical need to examine how parents' beliefs and knowledge regarding dual language development relate to DLLs' dual language experiences at home and their developmental outcomes«, since bilingual development is becoming a prominent phenomenon.[44] Therefore I propose that parents who make a decision to provide conditions for their children to develop bilingually, which can be classified as a choice, rather than a contextual demand or an expectation, are in fact agents of Imported Bilingualism. Future research would benefit from exploring the factors that drive parents to become agents of Imported Bilingualism and the factors that support them in achieving their goals.

42 King/Wright Fogle: *Family language policy*.
43 King et al.: *Family language policy*.
44 Luo et al.: *Parental Beliefs*.

5. What can educators do to reverse this trend?

My concept and approach to language learning and language maintenance, a Healthy Linguistic Diet (HLD), originally based on my research exploring attitudes to bilingualism in England and Wales,[45] further developed with Thomas Bak[46] and through my international consultancy work, addresses these issues by reaching out to all stakeholders with relevant information on the cognitive advantages of bilingualism. I see promoting the cognitive advantages of bilingualism, which apply to all combinations of languages, as a way to overcome hierarchies of languages and bilingualism.

The best way to explain the essence of an HLD approach is to draw a parallel between physical and mental health. Regular physical activity and a healthy diet are important factors in maintaining physical health. Similarly, language learning and its regular use provide essential mental exercise, leading to better brain health, and better cognitive development, functioning and performance throughout our lifetime with an accumulative increase in ›cognitive reserve‹ resulting in a later onset of dementia, as one of the many benefits.

The mission of HLD is »to initiate and facilitate a shift in thinking about learning other language/s as a key skill or an academic subject, to understanding that using two languages is a key ingredient in our cognitive development and well-being.« This is achieved by focusing »on developing life-long habits of learning and using at least two or more languages, based on awareness that these types of activities will help us equip our brains for enhanced cognitive functioning from our early years to advanced age.« An important part of the HLD mission »is to reach out to children, parents, communities with accessible knowledge on the cognitive benefits of bilingualism.«[47]

The revival of English-Welsh bilingualism in Wales offers an excellent example of what can be achieved through preparing parents to make an informed choice regarding selecting a bilingual upbringing and education over monolingualism for their children. One interviewee reflected on her experience: »If I had my time again I would send him [my son] to a Welsh medium school. I wasn't a Welsh speaker, my husband wasn't and I envisaged difficulties supporting my son, if he was in Welsh medium education. Now I think the benefit of having bilingual education would outweigh that.«[48]

45 Mehmedbegovic: *A study in attitudes*.

46 Bak/Mehmedbegovic: *Towards an interdisciplinary lifetime approach*.

47 *Healthy Linguistic Diet*. <http://healthylinguisticdiet.com>.

48 Mehmedbegovic: *A study in attitudes*, p. 159 (monolingual English lead professional, Wales).

What changed for her as a mother, as revealed in the continuation of the interview, was access to research findings and knowledge about the benefits of bilingualism. This issue, that parents as ›policy makers of early years‹ are actually largely uninformed on matters of bilingualism, was highlighted by the other interviewees along the lines of this quote: »They [parents] don't quite understand why it [bilingualism] is an advantage.«[49]

In Wales the initiative to raise awareness started with a focus on the parents of new born children and equipping health visitors to provide basic information on the benefits of bilingualism, free packs with further information and toys. This initiative Twf (Growth) launched in 2001.[50] The key point here is that the initial information to parents about bilingualism came from medical professionals and therefore the information shared on the developmental and cognitive advantages of bilingualism is delivered as early as possible for a new born child with the authority of a health professional.

HLD also advocates that medical and education professionals should work together and jointly reinforce awareness on the cognitive benefits of bilingualism throughout the different stages of our lives. The delivering of this message jointly by health and education professionals would extend its reach and amplify its impact.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have presented my argument for the need to introduce two new concepts: Imported Bilingualism and Academic Monolingualism. My argument is supported by my research and relevant insights gained through my different roles.

Imported Bilingualism as a new concept, if added to the typology of bilingualism, places the emphasis on foreign language learning and consequent bilingualism as an asset, resource and type of capital, which is of significant importance in terms of raising awareness that every language and every type of bilingualism is a type of capital and therefore of value. If affluent families are prepared to import it via private education in bilingual programmes or through different types of foreign language learning, then migrant communities should look to pass on their home languages to their children and support them in acquiring academic literacy in those languages. Imported Bilingualism I define as a parental commitment to import a

49 Ibid., p. 160.

50 Woodcock: *The Twf project*.

language of their choice into the family dynamics when that choice is not a necessity of migration, the context they live in or historical circumstance, but a choice parents make to enrich their children's development for the purposes of cognitive, educational, cultural, and social advantages, as well as economic and health advantages.

The reason why I see it as ground breaking to use a concept that comes from the economy, ›Imported‹, is to highlight the parallel with making a business decision to import certain goods. For example, when a business decision is made by a government or companies to import something like avocados, to make an analogy with a healthy diet, it is because this tropical fruit is desired and valued as a super food for our health and well-being. People in the UK and EU do not have to import avocados for their survival, but they make a decision to do so, they invest resources and efforts to make avocados an ingredient in their diet, because they are aware of their benefits, not found in eating only locally grown fruit. In that same way, some parents commit to importing a language of their choice into their family environment and making it an ingredient in their linguistic diet and family dynamic, with the aim of enhancing the development of their children. Bilingualism, through this process, takes the features of desired goods by being carefully selected, imported and utilised.

The main purpose of this stark analogy is to use it as a wake-up call for parents who make decisions to switch to speaking English at home when they move to the UK or even switch to English when they still live in their country of origin, which happens in Indonesia and Dubai. These decisions are always based on the best intentions to provide conditions for children to acquire proficiency in English as the global language, but at the expense of children using and developing their home language. My intention is that by highlighting the outlined phenomenon as Imported Bilingualism, one can look to raise awareness among all stakeholders that the home languages of immigrant, ethnic minority and indigenous communities which are present in many homes, but not utilised and valued, can deliver the same benefits as imported languages, which require a bigger investment for families who commit to them.

Academic Monolingualism is the second term I suggest needs introducing, as a term that has surfaced while exploring the consequences of families opting out of bilingual programmes, and in order to understand that speaking a language at home is not enough. As has been outlined previously, it is not enough to gain the Seal of Biliteracy, but it is also not enough in the long run, in terms of career opportunities and using bilingualism for academic and professional purposes. By opting out of bilingual programmes, where

they exist, parents choose Academic Monolingualism for their children and consequently disadvantage them. This is best illustrated by a quote from a 12-year-old boy in an international school in Dubai: »When I go back to Egypt, I want to help my little brother with Maths, but I can only do Maths in English not in Arabic. Miss, could you ask our headteacher if we could have one lesson a week of Maths in Arabic, so that I can help my little brother in the future?«[51]

This boy, who is a confident user of everyday Arabic, has very clearly illustrated what it means to be living a bilingual life, but suffer Academic Monolingualism. Bilingual children and adults need opportunities to acquire academic proficiency and skills in both the languages they use. The view that speaking a language at home is enough needs to be challenged by examples like this one. This quote speaks volumes, since we can clearly see that a 12-year-old child fully understands the problem he is facing and has identified the only way it can be remedied – being numerate in English and Arabic and doing Maths in both of these languages can only happen by studying Maths in English and in Arabic. My ambition is to make that possible through my Healthy Linguistic Diet approach in all the contexts I work in.

Academic Monolingualism I define as living bi/multilingual lives in terms of exposure, comprehension and oracy, but due to only having opportunities to study in one language, which is usually the national language of the country they live in or in English, if attending international schools, all subject specific vocabulary and registers acquired through academic learning are only existent for such learners in one of their languages. They cannot easily transfer and use the knowledge they have in Maths, Science, Humanities and other academic subjects, because they have not been given the opportunity to develop their home language in the academic domain. This process will then stop them from taking exams in their home language, acquiring qualifications, and later employment, which require general and academic biliteracy. Speaking a language at home can never be enough to take exams in that language. Therefore the potential convertibility of language capital into economic capital (after Bourdieu) is made redundant for learners who academically develop as monolinguals despite having two or more languages in their everyday lives.

The importance of having the opportunity to use one's home language in education is underpinned by the UNESCO Declaration of Children's Rights, Article 30, which states that every child has a right to use their own

51 Mehmedbegović-Smith: *Current and future challenges*, p. 534.

language.[52] I would like to argue that in education that needs to be interpreted as: every child needs to be given opportunities to develop academic literacy in their home language too. The HLD approach introduces different strategies which can be used in different curriculum areas, which will provide these important opportunities. Examples outlined below.

7. Future work

The HLD approach can be integrated into all formal and informal types of education contexts. In the same way that promoting healthy eating and healthy life styles is. Classroom teachers could address HLD in the relevant curriculum or pastoral sessions focusing on health and well-being by exploring the benefits of learning other languages and by providing opportunities for bilingual development, like creative writing in two languages. Parents could promote HLD at home by reading bedtime stories in two languages, while telling children why that is good for them. Policy makers would support this by ensuring sufficient space is given to the topics in the curriculum which raise awareness of the benefits gained by learning languages.

In 2020/21 an HLD project was launched with a sample of Italian comprehensive schools with a high percentage of migrants. The schools were selected by a public call and a requirement was to involve a team of teachers of English, Italian as a Second Language and other teachers who participated in training activities. According to evaluations, the HLD model is very effective and can be integrated into the school curriculum in a range of subject areas, as a part of the daily teaching practice. Different home languages used by pupils represented a large variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Pupils were encouraged to use their family dialects too. Pupils were engaged in producing posters, maps, word clouds, songs, and bi/multilingual storytelling. Families were invited to school to organise cultural festivals as a way to foster intercultural dialogue and peer learning.

As a final point: the Healthy Linguistic Diet is constantly developing and evolving through its implementation in practice, new research evidence and contribution to theory. The key principle of HLD is that the use of different languages is as beneficial for our well-being as eating a varied diet and the possibilities of implementing this principle through policy and practice in the education and health sectors are immense.

52 *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf>.

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