AGAINST THE ODDS

The challenges of bilingualism in a monolingual environment

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The aim of this study has been to describe the reasoning of five immigrant parents with Swedish partners who raise their child to become bilingual. Having interviewed the informants, three central themes became apparent: bilingualism, identity and the environment. All five families reason that they raise their child with the mother tongue of the mother and the mother tongue of the father and that it is natural. Discussions about identity and culture are made in specific reference to the surrounding monolingual environment, which is often perceived as an obstacle to bilingualism.
Keywords: bilingualism, mother tongue, the one – parent – one – language strategy, identity, monolingual environment

Nyckelord: tvåspråkighet, modersmål, en - förälder – ett - språk – strategin, identitet, enspråkig miljö
PREFACE

I want to thank all my informants for letting me get a glimpse of their world and sharing with me their thoughts and experiences. YOUR dedications have been an inspiration to me.

Björn Alm, my tutor, I thank you for your eye for details, as well as for our interesting discussions.

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Réka Keresztes
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INTRODUCTION

There is a general belief that people are forever changed from the moment they become parents. It is seen as a maturing process, where the individual often goes through a crisis and starts to see the world from another perspective. There are many hopes and expectations tied to a newborn child and the parents often think back to their own childhood when considering how to raise their child. Most people have strong opinions about what they want to avoid and what they want to pass on. The same is true for Ling, María, Yuming, Sam and Zarah.

This study is about the thoughts, ideas, hopes and fears of five people, who have all decided to raise their child to become bilingual. These five people have all decided that they want to attempt to pass on both their and their partner’s language and culture to their child. Despite different backgrounds, these parents have several things in common. They are all faced with a complex situation and they all go through a similar process, even though they choose their own paths, since the basic conditions are different. Finally, so Ling as Maria, Yuming, Sam and Zarah are constantly balancing two languages and two cultures in a monolingual environment, in Sweden. My aim was to find out their view on bilingualism, as well as their attitudes regarding their child’s identity and the surrounding environment.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine the reasoning of five individuals regarding the teaching of two languages to their children at home.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Although there are many interesting aspects to bilingualism, the focus of this study is on the informants reasoning about bilingualism, which has been examined with the help of the following questions:

1. What are the reasons behind the five families in this study choosing to raise their children to become bilingual?
2. What methods are used when teaching two languages at home?
3. How do the informants connect bilingualism to identity?
BACKGROUND

There are approximately 5,000 different languages in the world today, while there are only about 200 countries. Of those roughly 200 countries, only a quarter recognises more than one language officially. (Edwards, 1994: 1) In those countries, generally in Asia and Africa, where many languages are commonly used, multilingualism is valuable, or even necessary, for the everyday – life. It is also associated with high status. In countries with only one official language, as Sweden or USA, knowing several languages is neither necessary nor advantageous if one does not master the dominant language, which is the key to both survival and success. Being multilingual is sooner associated with minority groups, many of which are poor and are given a low status within the society. (Ladberg, 2003: 20) Moreover, for monolinguals, multilingualism might seem unnatural, difficult and complicated. It has been and still is, for many, not unusual to reason that learning several languages simultaneously or after one another, will result in not knowing any of the languages well. Semilingualism is a debated subject, which has often been discussed in connection to certain multiethnic suburban areas in Sweden, as for example Rinkeby. (Fraurud & Hyltenstam 2003: 307)

Considering the above, teaching a child several languages in Sweden is not necessarily a natural process, but is rather a matter of choice: both of language and of identity. It should also be emphasised that different languages are also valued differently. World languages, as English and Spanish, are considered prestigious and are positively met, while other languages as for example Turkish, Arabic or Somali are often negatively perceived. Similarly, different variations of the same language may be valued differently, as was the case with dialects in Sweden not so long ago. Anyway, the attitudes towards a language have nothing to do with the language itself, but give an account for the power relationship between the different language groups. (Ladberg, 2003: 21-23) For example, is it not interesting that the contemporary lingua franca\(^1\) is English, when the largest languages are Mandarin and Hindu? None of this is of course a new phenomenon. Earlier lingua francas, as for example Greek, Latin, French and Arabic, have similarly been associated with a powerful, influential and dominant society and not necessarily with the most widely spread language. (Edwards, 1994: 1-2)

\(^1\) A language used between people who have different mother tongues
With all of these things in mind, the question that is at the centre of this study is how parents with immigrant backgrounds reason when they choose to raise their children to become bilingual in Sweden. Let us take a closer look at some important concepts. What is bilingual and what is the difference between multilingual and bilingual? According to a free encyclopaedia, “A multilingual person, in the broadest definition, is anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading).” (URL1) Wanting to be more specific about the number of languages one is referring to, one may use the terms bilingual and trilingual. (URL1) Considering the subject of this essay, multilingualism will be limited to bilingualism.

At the first glance, one might think that there is nothing complicating about choosing which languages to teach to a child in a bilingual family. A common answer would be: the mother tongue or first language, of both parents. However, the subject is more complex than it first appears. When talking about a person’s mother tongue or first language, the terms have to be used carefully because they may, to a certain extent, be misleading. A free encyclopaedia states for example that having learnt one language as first language does not mean that it forever stays to be the dominant language of that person. Similarly, “mother tongue” does not necessarily refer to the language of the mother. Instead “‘mother’ in this context probably originated from the definition of mother as source, or origin, as in mother-land or land.” (URL2) Others, on the other hand, might find “the language which the mother speaks” or “the language a child learns first” good criterions. Further definitions are according to competence, that is, “the language a person knows best”, function, “a language one uses the most”, or attitude, “the language that one identifies with”. (Skutnabb – Kangas, 1981: 14-15) Each of these definitions represents specific disciplines, ranging from sociology, linguistics and sociolinguistics to social psychology. (Skutnabb – Kangas, 1981: 18) For this particular study, all of the above definitions are valid, because it is up to the individual parent to decide how he, or she, chooses to reason.

Having decided which languages the child will be taught, there are different strategies for parents to choose from when teaching two languages at home. The most common strategy for parents in bilingual families, where one of the parents speaks a minority language and the other parent speaks the majority language, is the “one – parent – one – language strategy”. The strategy is obvious. Each parent speaks one language with the child. Variations occur however, when considering how the parents talk to each other. The parents may use the
majority language, the minority language or continue using the same language as to the child. The family’s choice is naturally connected to the parents’ language knowledge. (Lenore 1988: 111)

Being brought up with two languages often also raises the issue of culture and identity. Culture can be defined as a certain type of life – style, which affects norms, values, opinions, ideas, emotions and behaviour. By living in a certain country, or environment the surrounding culture is taken in automatically. As a consequence, that specific culture is regarded as natural. (Harding & Riley, 1993:47 - 48) Bilingual families are, therefore often combining two different cultures, more or less, anyway. Due to the presence of two separate cultures, there are sometimes concerns from monolinguals that a child will become confused with the presence of two identities. Further, considering how people commonly speak about identity in Sweden, it often seems to be a matter of choosing one language or the other, one culture or the other. The question of interest seems always to be which of the two one identifies most with. In reality, bilingualism is on the contrary about the opposite: combining the two. It is actually not as radical as one might think if one considers the definition of the term identity. According to Lewellen (2002: 92), the term identity is complex, since it covers three different concepts. The first definition is tied to the individual’s perception of itself. However, individuals identify themselves differently from context to context, that is identity is situational. Moreover, identities are overlapping and might even be simultaneous. A woman can hence identify herself being a sister, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a nurse or Swedish in various situations, but also at the same time. The second perspective involves the society’s, or other’s, view on the individual. Here, the individual is often classified according to stereotypes, which are based on exaggerated generalisations. Finally, the third viewpoint is that of the social sciences, which often strive to place the individual into a culture. (Lewellen, 2002: 92-93) Hylland Eriksen (2004) and Brown (2004) both argue that identities are changeable. Brown refers to the works of Keyes (1981), Bentley (1987), Williams (1989), Harrell (1995) and Brown (1996), when she suggests that identities, in individuals as well as in groups, are formed by interaction with their social, political, economic and cultural contexts. At the same time, an individual’s identity is also a product of the individual’s interpretation of the surrounding world. However, as Brown summarizes Goffman’s (1963), Strauss’s (1992) and Strauss and Quinn’s (1994) arguments, these interpretations are made and understood with reference to the cultural meanings in a specific society, in which the individual lives in. (Brown, 2004:13) While Brown focuses on negotiated identities through
social interaction, Hylland Erikson is fascinated by the individual’s perception of itself. He explains that an individual’s view of itself is dependent on which perspective one has. He also suggests that individuals can swing in choosing between two opposing identities, to identifying themselves with both, or several identities, at the same time. (Hylland Eriksen 2004: 9)

Finally, there is one last point that should be made in connection to bilingualism, identity and culture. Human beings are social beings and are therefore shaped by interacting with others, as Durkheim proposed. He even claimed that individuals, without a proper socialisation and a wider identity in a group, will die. With this Durkheim wants to emphasise the importance and power of a group, which both can award and punish the individual. If a person follows the system of beliefs offered by the group, then the individual becomes a part of something greater then itself. If the individual rejects the social beliefs and breaks the social rules, the group will exert its power against the individual and punish the individual with for example shaming it out, for deviating from the group. (Wilk, 1996: 77-78) It is thus not surprising that the surrounding group with its rules and beliefs, or culture, has a powerful effect on the individual. However, the individual is not passive and always has a choice.

**INFORMANTS**

Of the five individuals who have been chosen and accepted to participate in this study, two are already familiar with the interviewer. One of these two individuals is a friend, while the other person is an acquaintance of mine. Three of the informants are strangers for the interviewer. The majority of the informants are female, that is, there is only one male informant in this study. Each informant has one child at the time of the interview and all children are under the age of four. To protect the privacy of the informants, all the informants’ names have been changed.

All five informants have foreign backgrounds, that is, none of them are born in Sweden. Further, all informants have Swedish partners and raise their child to become bilingual. Although sharing some obvious similarities, the informants are at the same time differing from each other due to different backgrounds, regarding both geography and language. One female informant is from Spain. Her name is María. Another female informant, called Zarah, is from Somalia. The other two female informants, Ling and Yuming are both from China, but
because of their different backgrounds, Yuming has chosen to teach her child the local language, Cantonese, while the Ling teaches her child the official language of China, Mandarin. The male informant, Sam, is from England.

**METHOD**

Considering the limitations that come with a C – thesis, this study is based on five interviews. The informants for this study were mainly selected with the help of personal networks of the interviewer, with the exception of one person, who is a friend of the interviewer. An important factor behind the selection of the informants was their languages. The purpose was to interview five informants coming from different countries and thus teaching different languages to their children. However, having the opportunity of including two people coming from the same country and teaching different languages to their children has been seen as a valuable contribution to this essay, which focuses on the reasoning behind the informants’ decisions. Similarly, including a man in the study was consciously done for the possibility of attaining another perspective. Naturally, all five informants are individuals and therefore also offer their own unique way of perceiving the subject.

All participants have been personally contacted by the interviewer for setting a date and time and deciding upon a place for the interview. The informants in this study have all been individually and informally interviewed. Each interview lasted about one hour. The interviewer took notes during each interview, but the interviews were also recorded, for better accuracy.

Four of the interviews were done in Swedish and one in English. Since the focus of this study is the reasoning of the informants, it was important to choose the best possible language that the informants could express themselves in. Naturally, the options were limited to the languages that also the interviewer can use for communication. Hence, in one case, English became the obvious choice, since the informant was fluid in English and had only been in Sweden for a short period of time.

All five interviews were transcribed and the obtained data were sorted according to themes. The quotations taken from the Swedish interviews in the study are all translated to English. My primary aim with these translations was to capture the authentic contents of the quotations.
Finally, I would like to bring up one last matter about the interviews, which can be of great significance and might be helpful to keep in mind when reading this thesis. The interviews were dealing with a number of complicated and delicate subjects, such as child upbringing and ethnic identity. Furthermore, the informants were sometimes asked to explain something that was self-evident for them, while sometimes they were faced with questions that they had not encountered before. One informant kept repeating that “I have never thought about this before.” Consequently, it was not always easy for the informants to express their reasoning regarding the different subjects. Similarly, it was not always easy for me to interpret them. Besides, the opinions that were expressed at the time of the interview have to be tied to that specific occasion. There are many factors which could have contributed to their answers, which might have been different if the interviews were done at another occasion, whether it would have been before or after the actual interview.

Brown brings up an interesting point that is highly relevant in association to the interview situation. In her discussion about identity, Brown notes that “at the most fundamental level, identity is the way that a person classifies him- or herself, a mental representation or thought.” (Brown 2004:13) Nevertheless, since it is impossible to know exactly what a person thinks, discussions about identity are only possible regarding the public representations of identity. In other words, research can only be based on the statements and the interpretations of statements and behaviours of the informants. It is important to be aware of this fact. People might have various reasons for not revealing their thoughts, which is of course outside the control of the researcher. (Brown 2004:14)

**DISPOSITION**

This thesis consists of three chapters, each dealing with a specific theme. It should however be mentioned that the three themes are closely connected and cannot be entirely separated. Every chapter is based on the interviews with the five informants, which are also at the centre of this study. Comments and discussions are made with reference to relevant theories.

The first chapter is called “Two languages at home” and gives an account for the informants’ own reasoning regarding the choices they have made in connection to bilingual language
teaching at home. There are two specific topics in focus, of which the first is about the informants’ mother tongues. The second topic reveals the different strategies that the parents have used, are presently using, or intend to use in the future, when teaching their child two languages.

The second chapter deals with identity and has received its title thereafter. Here, the informants describe their view of their child’s identity with specific reference to bilingualism and culture. These descriptions often start with the informants’ reasoning about their own background and identification, which are valuable for understanding the informants’ reasoning. Since the informants are all approaching the theme from different angles, this chapter is divided into five parts, each part being written about the opinions of one of the informants.

The last chapter is called ‘Environment’ and is about the informants’ thoughts about teaching two languages at home, while living in an otherwise monolingual Swedish environment. Apart from expressing their different opinions about the subject in general, the majority of the informants are specifically mentioning daycare in this context. Hence, daycare is an own topic.

The thesis ends with a discussion of the three chapters, with a specific reference to the research questions.
TWO LANGUAGES AT HOME

Although the five informants have different backgrounds which contribute to different conditions in their attempts to teach their child to become bilingual, all of them have one thing in common: they go through a similar process. Raising a child with two languages is a matter of choices and balance. As Zarah formulates it:

“We have not sat down and said that he should learn this much Somali and that much Swedish, it has come naturally. He learns what he learns. If he cannot a lot, then there are Somali schools, a little help. This is still the basics, that he will know that he is bilingual. We had a discussion about which language was his mother tongue when we had to apply for daycare. [My husband] was of the opinion that we should write Swedish and my opinion was that it absolutely should be Somali. In the end we agreed on both Swedish and Somali. A compromise, because we were afraid that if they focused on the fact that he learns Somali, they might think that he does not learn as much Swedish. If we were to write Swedish, then he was not learning as much Somali. So, we tried to find a balance, in order for him not to lose any of the languages. Since he is so young, it is so easy to lose and only learn [one language]. But now it [bilingualism]) comes naturally to him, since he does not know anything else.”

The mother tongue - a natural choice?

When the informants were asked about why they decided to teach their child the language of their choice, four of the five informants answered in a strikingly similar way: because it comes naturally to them. Some of the informants seemed almost confused by the question, as the answer seemed so self – evident to them. Ling, for example, said: “But, it is my language to her [the child]. It is called the mother tongue. I think that one should speak one’s mother tongue with one’s child.” María gave a similar answer: “I chose Spanish, because Spanish is my mother tongue. That is my language. It is most natural to me.” Another informant, Yuming, noted that she never thought about it, it just came naturally.
All five informants have chosen to raise their child with two languages at home, of which they consider one language being the mother’s mother tongue and the other the father’s. However, the meaning of mother tongue is not as given as it first might appear. Ling, a woman with Chinese background, grew up with a certain dialect, which was the language that she heard both at home and in her surrounding environment. However, in the interview, she is referring to Mandarin, which she learned at school and is the standard language of China, as her mother tongue. Apparently, for her, mother tongue is the language of her country, China. Her definition is therefore tied to her source of origin, that is, her mother land.

In contrast to Ling, Yuming, another informant from China, states that Mandarin is not her mother tongue, because she did not know Mandarin when she was a child. Instead she refers to Cantonese, a local language in China, as her mother tongue. Yuming emphasises that China is a big country with many cultural differences. Since she grew up in Canton and all her relatives speak Cantonese, Cantonese is the language that she identifies with. Still, Yuming remarks that, contemporarily, it is easier for her to express herself in Swedish then in Cantonese. Consequently, it can be concluded that for Yuming, her mother tongue is the language that she learned first and identifies herself with.

Maria, who was born and raised on the African side of Spain, in north Morocco, seems to reason similarly to Yuming. Her mother tongue, or the first language that she had learned was Spanish and she identifies herself with her Spanish background. At the same time, she has lived in Sweden for a long time and as a consequence, her vocabulary of certain subjects is only in Swedish. However, these are not dominating.

Zarah, also a female informant, who has her roots in Somalia, is the only informant who did not came to Sweden as an adult. She came to Sweden as a teenager and as a result, Swedish has become the language that she knows best. Despite that, she is determined to speak Somali with her son. She also considers Somali as her mother tongue. Her definition of mother tongue is then also referring back to her first language, or the language or her country, Somalia.

Finally, the male informant, Sam, considers English his mother tongue, because it is the language that he masters. He is thus the only one who defines mother tongue after competence. Still, while on the one hand defining mother tongue after competence, Sam is at
the same time expressing another view when referring to his partner’s mother tongue. The child’s mother comes from Sweden, but has lived in England for a long time. According to Sam, she now expresses herself best in English, despite her first language, or mother tongue, being Swedish until adulthood. Thus, Sam’s partner is considered to master English better, but still having Swedish as mother tongue. Hence, Sam has two definition of mother tongue: the language that one knows best and the first language that one has learned.

**Strategies of language teaching**

The following section is meant to give a picture of the different strategies that the five families in this study have used or intend to use when teaching their child two languages at home. Since there is only one strategy which is specifically mentioned in the literature, the “one – parent – one language – strategy”, it will be the only strategy being treated as an own topic. The other strategies are describes under the headline “Other strategies”.

**The one – parent – one – language strategy**

Each of the families in this study uses the same strategy for teaching their child two languages: the “one – parent – one – language strategy”. As the name of the strategy suggests, the basic idea is that each parent speaks one of the chosen languages with the child, but as it will soon be clear, the strategy is adapted by each family to their individual situation and comes therefore in many different forms.

It should be pointed out that only one of the informants, María, actually knew about the theoretical existence of this strategy. She has an interest in languages and has read about the subject before the birth of her daughter. “I am very interested and I find it a lot of fun. I have read about bilingualism, about different methods and about what type of problems one can encounter and so, we are prepared. But it does not always make it easier.” Having read about bilingualism, María has had the advantage of having the expert’s advices and other’s experiences as a guideline when making her decisions. She has been very conscious about her choices and has done everything that might help her to raise her child to become bilingual. She started to talk Spanish to her child already from the beginning, that is, during pregnancy. “I wanted it to be as natural as possible.” After the child was born, she continued to speak Spanish with her, while her husband always uses Swedish. When talking to each other, the
parents have used Swedish, because the father has a limited knowledge of Spanish. They have however not had any problems with using different languages with their daughter, because the father understands some Spanish.

There is specifically one detail of what María said that caught my attention and raised some questions regarding the reasoning of teaching two languages at home. As she was giving an account for the language patterns at home, María mentioned that when her daughter speaks Swedish, María often translates and repeats what the child said in Spanish. Similarly, she can sometimes translate what her husband says in Swedish to Spanish. Considering that the family is striving to teach the child, who is three years old, two languages, María’s translations seem strange and unnecessary. On the other hand, considering that her daughter mainly speaks Swedish, with Spanish only being present through certain words and grammatical characteristics, her behaviour makes more sense. My impression is that María reasons that there is no strategy needed for teaching her daughter Swedish, since she learns Swedish automatically through her environment, particularly at daycare. In contrast, María seems to find it vital to have a strategy for teaching her daughter Spanish, since there is already an unbalance between the languages. At the same time, she is realistic. “I doubt that she will be able to speak Spanish as Swedish. It would only happen if she moves there when she gets older, or something like that. I am aware that her language is Swedish and that Spanish is her minority language. But, my goal is that she takes in as much as possible.” Thus, the translations serve the purpose of exposing her daughter to Spanish whenever possible.

Ling and her husband have also used the “one – parent – one – language strategy”, already from the moment of their daughter’s birth. In their case, it has in addition been possible to use the same languages when communicating with each other as with their daughter, since both have enough knowledge in both languages. Hence, Ling always spoke Mandarin and her husband always spoke Swedish, even in the presence of others, that is friends or relatives. The strategy that I just described was their first approach, which has, only recently, been altered. Ling explains that they were very consistent with their strategy before, “But now that she has started daycare and she knows more Swedish words, I feel very small - surrounded by Swedes.” Her daughter, who is only 15 months old, says words in both languages, but Swedish has become dominant since she started daycare. As a consequence Ling has tried to find a way to counteract the unbalance between the two languages, just as María. Ling’s solution was to encourage her husband to speak Mandarin to their daughter. Due to a passive
vocabulary in Mandarin, her husband mixes Swedish and Mandarin. In other words, they still use the “one – parent – one - language strategy” in practice, but they have changed it slightly, to better suit their contemporary situation.

In Sam’s case, the “one – parent – one – language strategy” was only recently and partially introduced. His child is 18 months old and was born in London. The family lived in London during the child’s first year and both parents spoke English with him, as well as each other. The reason was that the child’s mother, who is originally from Sweden, had lived in England for a long time and according to Sam, English was easier for her too, since it was her adult language. However, after they moved to Sweden, the mother has started to use Swedish when she is alone with her son. Still, the family uses mainly English at home. Sam reasons that when the mother has been in Sweden for a longer period of time, she will be more comfortable with speaking Swedish and will eventually speak mainly Swedish with her son. Despite the contemporary dominance of English at home, Sam believes that the situation will eventually change. “I think that his first language will be more Swedish, spoken language.” In other words, he is aware that the child will be more exposed to Swedish through the environment and that will result in his son being probably more used to Swedish, at least when it comes to the spoken part of the language. Sam continues by saying: “I think, to be honest, eventually, he’ll speak both [languages] absolutely fluently.” Reading this quotation, it is obvious that Sam is not worried about one the balance between the two languages, as María and Ling is.

Zarah and her husband have similarly to the other families also chosen to apply the “one – parent – one language strategy” when speaking to their child. Zarah always speaks Somali with her son and the father speaks Swedish. The parents speak Swedish to each other. Nevertheless, when they have Swedish visitors, Zarah speaks Swedish with her son and when they have a visitor who speaks Somali, she speaks Somali to the child. Her explanation is the following: “I want him to be able to find where the languages belong. That is why I do like this.” She goes on by exemplifying:”He speaks Somali automatically when he sees my neighbour.” Zarah’s reasoning and concern for the child’s ability to know when to use which language origins from the fact that her child mixes Swedish and Somali and uses both languages with everybody. She describes the situation: “It is very important, because we already have a problem, since he speaks Somali at daycare. It is vital that the child knows which language is appropriate with which person and learns not to mix, which he does
Zarah’s statement shows that she is concerned about certain communication problems that her son might have due to the presence of two languages. Focus is here on his ability to know how to choose the right language, rather than one language being dominant over the other.

While Zarah, Sam, as Ling and Maria began to speak the language they consider as mother tongue with their child already from the beginning, Yuming started with speaking Swedish with her daughter. The reason behind her choice is that Swedish was the easier alternative, because she finds it easier to speak in Swedish. Yuming further suggests that she was not used to speaking with children and moreover, she had no experience from speaking with children in Cantonese. Consequently, it was easier for her to learn how others spoke and what kind of language they used when speaking Swedish to her daughter and do the same. Apart from language difficulties, Yuming was also struggling with her role as a parent. Her role models for parenthood were her parents, who had a typical Chinese way of bringing up children. For example, child upbringing was characterised by authority. According to Yuming, her language is strongly tied to the Chinese culture that she was brought up with. As a result, she thought that it would be too difficult to raise her daughter with Cantonese. “What I want to say is that those types of differences and my inexperience with children were the reasons why I thought it was difficult to speak Cantonese with her.” Yuming argues that language is closely tied to culture and therefore inevitably to parenthood. Despite difficulties, Yuming later decided that she has to speak Cantonese to her daughter and started to do so when the child was only a couple of months old. Since then, the family uses the “one – parent – one – language strategy”. Yuming comments the change in strategy: “It is nicer when she speaks Cantonese with me. It is much more fun that some expressions…I recognise myself when I talk with her.” Yuming is always using Cantonese when addressing her daughter and her husband uses Swedish. The parents speak Swedish with each other. The child, who is soon four years old, understands and speaks both languages. Earlier, the parents were worried, because her dominant language was Cantonese. The parent’s felt that it is important for the child to speak Swedish in order to be able to communicate with the other children at daycare. Furthermore, they were worried by the fact that other children in their daughter’s age could express themselves better. However, the problem was solved, when the mother started to read stories in Swedish. After only a couple of months, the child expressed herself excellently, even using phrases and words which neither parents use. There are now no problems with the child’s Swedish, on the contrary. Swedish has started to dominate. However, the mother wants
balance and therefore let’s the child know that “mommy doesn’t understand” when she speaks Swedish to her.

**Other strategies**

The informants’ children are all below the age of four, which naturally affects the strategies of language teaching. Ling has for example described an interesting strategy that she has read about, which both she and her husband have used. When their daughter is making sounds that they do not understand, they both react with altering the sound that their daughter has made into a real word in the particular language. The parents are then playing the role of an interpreter and they lead her into a specific language. Further, they repeat the word and encourage the child to do it as well. To exemplify, if the child says “bili” and she is alone with her father, he will react by validating her and saying “bil”, which means “car” in Swedish. Then he repeats it and maybe even points out a car to his daughter. It is through these types of interpretations, repetitions and encouragements that children are formed by their environment, according to Ling.

Another interesting aspect that came up in some of the interviews is the language of the children and their understanding of the two separate languages that their parents try to teach them. Sam notices: “It is really interesting with his speaking. He has got a total vocabulary of maybe 50 words, but he can understand both perfectly.” The child understands both English and Swedish and mixes the languages when he speaks. At the same time, the child also uses specific sounds to express himself. In other words, his language is consisting of Swedish, English and different sounds. These are one language to him. So, when he is told to say “hej då” in Swedish, he always uses the English expression “bye bye”. Likewise, if he falls, he will always use the Swedish word “ramlade”, when describing it. However, if he sees a horse, he never says “horse”, or “häst” in Swedish, but will make the sound of a horse.

Zarah has also reflected over her son’s ability to understand her. “I don’t know if it is the language he understands, or my way of saying things. He understands 90 percent of what I say. But then maybe I say it the same way as I would have in Swedish. He is so young that it is impossible to decide how much of language he actually understands.” Zarah has an interesting point that needs to be considered. Communication is much more then just words. It
consists also of body language, intonation, tone and other factors. However, due to the limited space and the focus of this thesis, I will not continue discussing this matter further.

The majority of the informants use, or plan to use, DVDs and books as their primary tools for ensuring the continuous presence of the minority language. Reading stories and watching cartoons are generally considered the easy and fun ways to be exposed to and learning a language. Zarah has a slightly different strategy. She is not reading stories, but telling stories. Zarah explains that in her childhood, it was more common to tell stories then reading them. “It is more personal. That is the way I have been raised. He listens to my voice, my view, I can develop things, make up stories. I can read a story and then add a little and make it fun for him.” An interesting point that should be made is that Zarah has chosen to use Swedish when talking about books, while she uses Somali when she shows her son pictures and tells him about his relatives. The reason behind her decision is that she feels that it is better for her son that he knows the content of the books in Swedish, since he might find the same book at daycare and would only be confused when he started to talk about the book in Somali and nobody would understand him. Thus, Zarah has decided that anything that can make his stay at daycare easier she describes and explains in Swedish, while she uses Somali when talking about personal matters, as for example her family. Zarah is also singing for her son, which she has done since he was born. “When we sing I might do some ridiculous sounds, because he finds that amusing and he laughs.” Similarly as with telling stories, singing is a cultural characteristic that she passes on. She is actually quite surprised over her own behaviour. Zarah notes:

“I have tried to hang on to the Somali culture and learn more then I thought that I would. I tried to learn as much as possible to be able to teach him now. I did not believe that about me. I did not think that I was interested in teaching him my language, my background, my family. I did not think that. I thought that I would say, well, he learns when he learns. But as soon as I gave birth to him and he started to be a little older, then I felt that I want to teach him all this; that it is an important part of me that he should learn. I did not think that I would take it so hard, very hard, that he should learn. I thought that he could learn when he gets older, but one changes one’s mind quite often. What I am surprised over is that I have been holding on to [the Somali culture], that I am learning stories, I sing for him and so on.”
Zarah is surprised that she wants to teach her child the Somali culture to the extent that she has sought up elder Somalians and asked them to teach her, for example, Somali songs and stories. What caught my attention was also that Zarah described that it was hard for her to speak Somali. She would be more comfortable in switching automatically to Swedish when speaking with her child. Yuming pointed out the same thing. However, both are determined to use the language of their choice to the child, despite difficulties and note that it becomes easier with time.

While Zarah and Yuming find it difficult to communicate in their “mother tongues”, María brings up another problematic matter. She asks herself: “Can the communication between her and me be good?” María fears that, in the future, the communication between her and her daughter might be negatively affected by her daughter’s incomplete Spanish knowledge. She is concerned that they will not be able to be close, because her daughter will have problems with expressing herself properly in Spanish, which will be their language of communication. In other words, María is not worried about her daughter’s language skills in itself, but rather the consequences these might have on their relationship in the future. She explains:

“If she learns two languages, I see no problems, but only advantages. I am concerned about the way leading there. What I am most afraid of is not that she will not speak correctly, because that doesn’t matter, she can learn that later. What I am most afraid of is that the communication between her and me would not be complete, because she has language deficiencies. That is what worries me the most. That she will get older and she, for example, has the need of talking about deeper issues and since we speak Spanish and she maybe does not have enough [knowledge of Spanish], we would have a bad communication – mother and daughter.”
IDENTITY

Discussing bilingualism automatically raises the question of identification, because there are cultural values and social norms passed on through every language. Being brought up with two different cultures is often considered problematic, especially if the cultures are radically different from each other. This chapter gives an account for the informants’ view of their children’s identities. In most cases, the explanations given are preceded with an explanation of the informants’ own identities. Since identity cannot be completely separated from language and culture, both of these subjects will be included in the following discussions, with specific reference to the theories of Lewellen, Hylland Eriksen and Brown.

The given identity

All five informants are striving to pass on what they consider their language to their child. Can the same be done with identity? Can a child receive the identity of one or both parents? Are identities self–evident? Are there identities that one cannot get rid of? Or, is it possible to ensure and give a certain identity to one’s child by creating a certain environment?

A changeable identity

Ling approaches the question of her daughter’s identity by discussing the present situation, as well as making presumptions about the future. Above all, she regards her daughter’s identity as changeable. “It is [bilingualism] for the moment natural for her. It is as with her looks. It shows that she is mixed. I think that she will also identify herself by knowing two languages. But later, I think she will consider herself being Swedish.” Ling describes that bilingualism, just as her mixed looks, are traits that characterise her daughter and which are contemporarily natural for her. However, Ling thinks that, apart from her looks, which reveals that she is mixed, her daughter will also identity herself by being bilingual. Still, Ling reasons that eventually, her daughter will identify herself as being Swedish. ”If one lives in Sweden, then it is that culture that affects one the most. I don’t think that she will feel that she has her roots in China. I don’t think so.” In other words, Ling believes that a person is formed by its environment and that her child will not identify herself with her Chinese background.
Ling’s reasoning reflects Brown’s perspective. According to Brown (2004:13), it is vital to recognise that identities are not fixed, unchangeable entities, but are on the contrary, constantly socially negotiated through interaction. Furthermore, the individual’s own interpretation of itself is affected and interpreted according to the cultural meanings which the individual is surrounded with in the society that the individuals lives in.

**A mongrel identity**

When I asked Sam about his identity, he simply gave me the answer that he does not know what his identity is. According to Sam, England is a mongrel, a ‘mixed’ country. He points out that there are no obvious answers for questions as “*What is English?*” or “*What is being English?*”. His reasoning about his own identity is interesting, especially because it is closely connected to his perception of his son’s identity. Sam is of the opinion that it is only when one is not accepted that one has to assert oneself. In his view, English has furthermore a special position in relation to other minority languages in Sweden, partly because it is spoken by many people and is therefore not tied to a specific group or specific things as other minority languages can be. He mentions that he has the possibility and the advantage of speaking a language that most people in Sweden are familiar with and speak. That means that he could probably survive in Sweden by only using his mother tongue, which is not possible for other immigrants in Sweden.

The ideas that Sam expresses are interesting to consider. Being an Englishman, today, means that one has access to the language all over the world. Furthermore, since English is the contemporary lingua franca, the language is neither threatened nor associated with negative characteristics as inferiority, on the contrary. Consequently, Sam’s position is completely different from those ethnic groups who are threatened or marginalised, or both. For those people, language often becomes a symbol that has strong political value. (Ladberg, 2000: 130)

Regarding his son’s identity, Sam believes that there is only one determining factor that is of importance: “*The question is: will he be accepted?*” Sam has heard that it is difficult to be accepted in Scandinavia, in comparison to countries like England or the U.S. Some say that it takes three generations, to become accepted in Sweden. If his son will be accepted then there will be no reasons for him to assert himself, according to Sam.
Sam believes that his son’s identity will be determined by how others will perceive and treat him. In other words, Sam puts emphasis on the socially determined parts of identity. He views the stereotypic classification, which Lewellen (2002:92) speaks about, as the only obstacle for his son to become accepted in the Swedish society.

The language is the key

María’s reflections over her daughter’s identity show that the situation is complex. On the one hand she says: “My daughter is Swedish, her main language is Swedish and she has no problems with the Spanish identity, because it is in reality very small, since it is only I who affect her.” On the other hand, María perceives her daughter as bilingual: “[…] she is bilingual, absolutely. I mean she understands completely and when she has the need she uses Spanish words.” Thus, María’s daughter is bilingual in the sense that she understands both languages, but since she is far more dominant in Swedish in overall, it is not surprising that her mother regards her as Swedish. Still, María hopes and believes that her daughter’s identity will become affected by the fact that she is taught two languages. The child has recently learned the word ‘Spanish’ (Español) and understands the concept. She knows for example that her grandmother does not understand Swedish.

While acknowledging that Swedish is more dominant in her daughter’s life at the moment, María strives towards a more equal balance between the two languages and with that between the two cultures. She emphasises that her daughter has her roots in both Spain and Sweden and in order for her to be able to understand both her parents and herself, she has to become familiar with both languages. Thus, it is only by mastering the language that she will have the key to the culture. María says:

“I am convinced that language and culture are connected. You cannot understand one without the other. So, in order for my daughter to understand a little more of me and of herself too, because she has also, in a certain way, her roots in Spain, I am convinced that she has to learn to understand Spanish, otherwise she will not understand it all.”
Maria suggests that her daughter will not have any identity problems, because the Spanish identity is nearly non existent. At the same time, she also views her daughter as bilingual and strives towards her daughter learning more of both Spanish and the Spanish culture. Thus, María attaches at least two identities to her daughter in this context. It is impossible to guess how María’s daughter will identify herself, but one thing seems obvious: María believes in changeable identities like mentioned by Hylland Eriksen (2004) and Brown (2004).

**Flexible identities**

Yuming explains that her identity is important to her and she therefore wants her daughter to have knowledge about, as well as being a part of, her culture. “It is important that she has my identity. It is vital.” Nevertheless, Yuming points out that she wants her daughter to identify with both languages and both cultures. Further, she also emphasises that she does not want to force her child into anything. However, Yuming thinks that when she will take her daughter to China, the child will want to learn more Cantonese and possibly even study in for example Hong Kong. Anyhow, Yuming has not thought about which culture dominates or will dominate her daughter’s identity and she does not think that she needs to worry about it either. Yuming rather believes that her daughter will be flexible and adapt her language and behaviour to the person that she communicates with. In other words, when speaking to Cantonese, she will talk and act in a certain way, while when communicating with Swedes, she will speak and behave in another way. Yuming’s reasoning is built on her own experience.

Yuming’s reasoning of combining different identities illustrates the theories of both Lewellen (2002) and Hylland Eriksen (2004). While Lewellen maintains that an individual changes its identity according to context, Hylland Eriksen suggests that one’s self perception depends on perspective and accepting one identity does not necessarily mean that one has to exclude another.

**A balanced identity**

Zarah considers herself being both Swedish and Somali. At the same time she argues that, since she is married to a Swedish man and works and lives in Sweden, she is a Swedish woman to 90 percent.
"I did not know that I am 90 percent Swedish until I started to socialise with the Somali people. I act totally different from how a Somali woman does. I answer in a totally different way; I say things as they are, while they are very careful. I behave completely different. There are many differences between us."

In other words, Zarah identifies herself as mainly Swedish because she compares her own behaviour with the behaviour of other Somali women and realises that they are very diverging. Her reasoning supports Brown theory of negotiated identities through social interaction. Brown has suggested, with reference to Yelvington’s work (1991), that there are a number of different factors that affect the identities of individuals. These factors are the following: the surrounding culture, or cultures, interpretation of the specific identities, the status and power that is associated with that specific identities and the characteristics attached to the identities that are used for their categorization. Consequently, the identities of individuals are formed through social interaction. It is in this process that individuals negotiate about their identities both with people who claim the same and those who claim different identities. (Brown 2004:14-15) In Zarah’s case, the negotiations take place by socialising with people who claim the same identity.

When I asked Zarah about her son’s identity, she answered as follows:

"He is 50 – 50. He is now, I don’t know how he will develop and I don’t know what his personality will be like, he might just as well have a tendency to socialise with Somali friends and become more Somali then Swedish, but the way he is now, the way we are at home, he is 50 percent Somali and 50 percent Swedish."

Zarah’s reasoning regarding her son’s identity deserves a closer examination. Since Zarah has suggested that she is 90 percent Swedish, it comes as a surprise that she thinks her son to be 50 percent Somali and 50 percent Swedish. There is a logical explanation though. Zarah believes that she now behaves mainly as a Swedish person, but she is of Somalian descent. ”I will tell him how it was in Somalia, what values we had, our view of life and so on. I will try to tell him as much as possible because, still, my culture is a part of who I am.” Besides, Zarah emphasises that she and her husband raise their son to become half Swedish and half Somali. She mentions, for example, that she spends time with her Somali neighbours, hoping
that they will influence her son. "I hope that he will pick up more from them then from me - that is why I socialise with them. It is why I hope that he will be 50 – 50; that he will take after others and not just me.” It seems as Zarah wants to provide her son with the opportunity of gaining an equal insight into both cultures. As a consequence, she leaves her son with Somali people, who will serve as role models in how to behave according to the Somali culture. Zarah hopes that her son is in this way given the possibility of experiencing a typical Somali environment.
ENVIRONMENT

Striving to teach a child to become bilingual is not always an easy task in a monolingual environment. The following pages will both mirror the informants’ perception of the Swedish environment and their attitude towards it. Daycare is given special attention, since it is the main source of socialisation for the children in this study. Comments are made with reference to Harding and Riley’s and Durkheim’s theories.

When I asked Ling if she finds one of the two languages, Swedish and Chinese, more important, she answered as follows: “It depends on which environment one is in. If one lives here, then it is important with Swedish, if one lives in China, then Chinese is important.” Her statement illustrates that although striving to teach the child two languages, one has to take the surrounding environment into consideration, since it is a decisive factor regarding the survival and success of the individual. Thus, Ling’s daughter has to first of all master the official language of the country.

Although regarding Swedish as more important, since the family lives in Sweden, Ling is at the same time clearly frustrated: “Now that I have a daughter and I want to teach her Chinese and I want her to inherit some things from me, I feel so small and helpless sometimes. Because, still, we are here, and it is here that she will grow up ... in principle the whole world is Swedish, except me.” It seems as Ling feels that she is alone in her strife of teaching her daughter the Chinese language and culture. She points out that everybody speak Swedish, even those who are not Swedish. There is Swedish in the daycare, schools and the media is in Swedish as well. Furthermore, her daughter has only access to the Swedish relatives. Ling believes that the Swedish environment will have a strong impact on her daughter, but she does not want her daughter to loose Chinese either. “Swedish will become natural for her, but she has to have Chinese with her.” Ling and her husband have been contemplating to travel to China, for a vacation. Still, she states that if they got to China, they will only do it for her daughter’s language. Although teaching her daughter Chinese is important, there are certain limits for what Ling would agree to for the language’s sake. It is for example not unusual within the Chinese culture to let the children grow up at the grandparents for a certain period. However, Ling cannot imagine sending her child to China for a longer period. “I can’t do that, I cannot do that.” She notes that it would be best for the languages sake, but not when it
comes to the child’s upbringing. If her child would be sent to China, she would learn more then just the language and she does not want that. Besides, Ling wants to be a part of her daughter’s upbringing and show her the way according to her ability.

Harding and Riley (1993:47-48) propose that by living in a certain environment, one becomes familiar with it to the extent that it seems natural to one. Ling seems to accept and even want her daughter to be comfortable with the Swedish environment, since it is here they live. Nevertheless, she fears that her daughter might loose Chinese, due to the dominance of the Swedish language in her daughter’s environment. Thus, Ling and her husband have considered traveling to China to provide her an environment where Chinese is the dominant language. It is however interesting that Ling does not want her daughter to be brought up at her grandparents in China, because she would learn more than just the language. Thus, Ling is primarily interested in teaching her child Chinese and passing on her own values and culture.

Similarly to Ling, María recognises Swedish as being the dominant language of her daughter. She also adds: “[…] I regard her completely integrated in her environment, unfortunately. Sometimes I wish that Spanish could take a greater part, but it is not possible for now.” Instead they hope that the child will get to know some other children through “the mother tongue education”\(^2\), when she is four and eventually learns more Spanish in school. María says:

“\textit{I am very aware of bilingualism and the hardships. I am very aware and I think very much about that, sometimes too much. I really want... but it is a little better now that I have started to realise that, at least the way it is now, my daughter will not be able to master Spanish as Swedish. I was hopeful in the beginning, but I have now understood that it is too little if it is only the mother [who is speaking the language].}”

María has been exerted herself to the outmost for her daughter to become as good in Spanish as in Swedish, but has been forced to realise that it is not enough. María cannot alone balance the impact of the surrounding Swedish environment. Like Ling, María feels alone and inadequate. She emphasises that the child would have to hear the language from others as well.

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\(^2\) Mother tongue education – formal education being given at daycare or school for children who have a minority language as their mother tongue (often defined as their first language or language of origin)
Unfortunately, María does not have any Spanish relatives in Sweden and does not spend time with other Spaniards either. However, for the sake of the language, she could imagine sending her daughter to her sister in Spain over a summer, but the child is too young for that for the moment.

Like Ling, María also feels that her daughter is integrated in her environment and there is not much space over for Spanish. However, María is not against the idea of sending her daughter away to her sister, where her daughter would hear Spanish from others and be surrounded with a certain type of environment, which would automatically pass on another culture. (Harding and Riley, 1993)

Sam has a different approach. For him, living in Sweden or France, London or Birmingham is the same thing. One makes a choice of where to live and he and his partner has chosen to live in Sweden. “I personally see myself as a European.” According to Sam, English is everywhere and the culture is fairly alike. He explains that his son is exposed to both languages, Sweden and English, and they will encourage him to read English books. However, Sam believes that the child would learn English in Sweden anyway. He thinks it important though that the child learns several languages, because it will then be easier to learn new ones. Furthermore, Sam does not perceive his son as isolated from the British people, since Britain is not so far away and they still have family and friends there. “He’s not missing out on anything by being here, that he would be exposed to in England.” Besides, Sam points out that he himself has grown up in a multicultural environment, similar to the place where Sam lives today, which some consider also being a multicultural environment. For Sam, a multicultural environment is more natural then a homogeneous cultural environment. Sam also emphasise that he wants to teach his son everything and not exclude him from anything. “There’s nothing I would exclude him from.” He mentions that as a parent one could actively stop one’s child from being a part of something if one has strong opinions about it, but he has no such thoughts. Instead Sam continues by saying that his son will probably follow the Swedish traditions, which will become natural for him due to the Swedish environment and he does not mind. Still, while Sam has nothing against the Swedish traditions, he does not want his son to take on the Swedish values as ‘Jantelagen’\(^3\) and being ‘lagom’\(^4\). These statements show that,

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\(^3\) Jantelagen – rules of living that claim that one should not believe that one is significant

\(^4\) Lagom – the idea that it is best when something is an appropriate amount, that is not too much and not too little; refers also to how a person should be
Despite his strive of not excluding his son from anything, Sam is just another parent who makes judgements about what his child should or should not take in. It is impossible not to make choices and by choosing, one automatically excludes certain other alternatives. The same situation arises with Sam’s religious background. Since he is Jewish and he will eventually teach his son about the Jewish traditions, there are certain things that his son will be excluded from as a consequence, as for example confirmation.

In accordance to Durkheim’s theory about socialisation into groups (Wilk, 1996: 77-78), Sam believes that his son will be socialised into the Swedish environment. He notes that his son will master the Swedish language and probably take part in the Swedish traditions. At the same time, Sam is also convinced that his son will speak English fluently as well and will not encounter any greater differences in cultural contexts, since the Swedish and the English cultures are very similar. Still, Sam has one objection against the Swedish environment and that is the mentality of the Swedish people. He wants his son to have English values.

In Yuming’s view, there are advantages and disadvantages with both the Swedish and the Cantonese culture. As a result, Yuming wishes that her daughter would take after both cultures. She emphasises that it is important that her daughter is flexible. Nevertheless, she would prefer that her daughter had Cantonese values. Yuming wants to teach her daughter to show respect to one’s parents, being flexible, diligent as well as being loyal and helpful to the family. It is very seldom that they, as a family, spend time with other Cantonese families, but she notes that they intend to travel to China as often as possible, although there are unfortunately economic limitations to take into consideration. Yuming would like to go to China more often than it is possible. “It is important for her to speak Cantonese, spend time with the children there, learn the culture and get to know grandmother and grandfather; to see how they live. It is very important.” The quotation mirrors that there is not one specific factor that Yuming wants her daughter to experience, but rather the whole, the environment with everything that it has to offer.

As Sam, Yuming does not want her daughter to have only Swedish values either, even though she wishes that her daughter would feel comfortable with both cultures. Therefore, Yuming would like her daughter to become socialised into the Cantonese environment as well, although it is not always to arrange in practice.
Zarah’s relation to the Swedish environment is different to the other informants, because she came to Sweden in her early teens and has therefore partially grown up with the Swedish environment. Thus, the Swedish environment is familiar to her and she is not threatened by it. In other words, Zarah is used to and has to a certain extent internalised the Swedish culture and language. She explains for example that when she and her brother speak, they automatically use Swedish, since they have grown up here. Moreover, Zarah states that she does not mind that her relatives speak Swedish with her son, because eventually they switch over to Somali, just as easily as they probably switch back to Swedish when they want to express something more exact. In other words, they can express themselves more accurately and nuanced in Swedish.

Similarly to the other informants, Zarah had no contact with other fellow – countrymen before. However, since her son is born, she has developed a relation to a Somali neighbour and his sister for his son’s sake. She reasons that this Somali contact is enough for them, because both she and her son can practice Somali and improve their language skills. At the same time, Zarah is aware and accepts the fact that they live in Sweden and that Swedish will probably be her son’s dominant language. She says:

"It evens itself out. It does not matter that he knows more Swedish then Somali, because it can never be equal. He should be able to understand and express himself; that is what is most important. Eventually when he grows up a little, one can teach him more, but for starters it does not matter if it is not so much. I have to work hard and teach him Somali and the Somali people can speak to him...but he must be able to express himself well in one language and it has to be Swedish, because we are in Sweden. I don’t think about it so much, I don’t take it so hard. That we teach him a lot of Somali is only because we want it to be easier for him when he gets older and starts to learn how to pronounce the language, how to use words. It is easier when he is young then for him to start when he is about 10 years old. It will not stick in the memory as well then."

Although she has grown up in Sweden, Zarah, just as the other informants, wants to pass on some Somali values to her son. These values regard respect to other people, being warm and having a welcoming, friendly way, as well as being able to create closeness within the family. Furthermore, in contrast to the other informants, Zarah has succeeded to create a Somali
environment for her son through her neighbours, where he will socialised into the Somali culture. In this way, she tries to balance the otherwise surrounding Swedish environment and culture.

**Daycare**

Four of the five informants brought up daycare as an institution which indirectly counteracts the informants’ efforts to teach their children two languages. How do the informants reason?

Ling describes that they have been very consistent with the one - parent – one – language strategy until her daughter started daycare. Since then the situation has changed. Ling says: "[...] she has started daycare and can more and more Swedish words and then I feel very small - surrounded by Swedes." As a consequent, Ling wants to increase the use of Mandarin at home and has asked the father to also speak Mandarin with her. Due to his limited knowledge, he mixes the two languages, but he uses Mandarin words to the extent that he can. Ling argues that they should speak more Mandarin at home in order to create a balance to the Swedish environment, which in this specific case is the daycare.

According to María, her daughter’s language skills have changed and have developed extensively due to daycare. She has two specific examples on which she bases her conclusion. First, the parents have noticed that the child uses Swedish expressions that none of the parents use. The child has even started to take after the local dialect. Second, María has realised that after a whole week at daycare (8 am until 16 pm every day), it is impossible to speak Spanish with her daughter on a Friday afternoon. On the other hand on Monday mornings, when they have spent the whole weekend together, the child is much better in Spanish. These fluctuations in María’s daughter’s languages skills are very clear and show that a language needs regular training.

Yuming talks about another type of fluctuations in her daughter’s language. She notes that in the beginning, her daughter’s dominant language was Cantonese. However, as she started daycare, Swedish took over. Then, they went on a vacation to Canton over the summer and when they came home, the child could almost only speak Cantonese. Yuming views these fluctuations as typical for her daughter.
Like Ling, María and Yuming, Zarah has also perceived that her son has developed more in Swedish due to daycare. “He can a lot more in Swedish, because of what he has learnt since he started daycare... and then he talks with his father. It results in more Swedish then Somali.” Similarly to María, Zarah thinks that her son easily switches to Swedish and forgets Somali after being at daycare. “I have to fight hard to keep the language because when he gets started at daycare, he forgets Somali.” As the others, Zarah does not want her son to completely lose Somali, even though she accepts that Swedish will dominate.

Looking at daycare from Durkheim’s perspective on socialisation, daycare is an institution of the society, where the language, values and rules of society are taught to young children. The children are this way automatically socialised into the dominant culture of Sweden. The informants consider the Swedish language, environment and culture a natural part of their children’s lives, but react as they become all too dominant.
CONCLUSION

Ling, María, Yuming, Sam and Zarah have all with their partners decided to raise their child with two languages. Despite the different backgrounds of the informants, there are certain similarities in their reasoning regarding the subject. All five informants suggest that they are teaching their child their and their partner’s mother tongue and most of them emphasise that it is a natural thing. However, the term mother tongue can be defined in several ways, which is illustrated by the answers of the informants. While Zarah, María and Yuming define mother tongue as their first language, Ling considers mother tongue to be the language of her mother land and Sam defines mother tongue according to competence. In other words, the mother tongue of the informants’ is sometimes a matter of perspective and not naturalness. Thus, if one would have ask them about which language they master today, which language they learned first and which language is of their mother land, instead of asking them their opinion of which language they consider their mother tongue, one would probably get different answers to these questions.

There are also some basic similarities in the informants’ strategies for teaching both languages to their child at home. All five families are using the one – parent – one – language strategy, even though each family has adapted the strategy to their own family situation. For example, in Sam’s family, the situation is reversed to the other informants. Instead of both parents having Swedish as the common language, they have English, which is also the dominating language at home. Apart from the one – parent – one – language strategy, the parents are also taking advantage of DVDs and books. However, it seems that in most cases, these media are primarily used for the minority language. Moreover, it seems that some of the informants, as María and Ling, are trying to expose the child to the minority language as much as possible, while being at home. So, while teaching two languages is considered natural, most of the parents have special methods for ensuring bilingualism, since Swedish often becomes more dominant than the other language, due to the impact of the surrounding Swedish environment. María even expresses her concern regarding the limited Spanish skills of her daughter, which might affect their communication and consequently their relationship in the long term.

Bilingualism is a complex matter, because it closely tied to culture and thereby identity. Most informants believe that language and culture are inseparable. Language is considered a
medium for passing on values and norms of a specific culture. Therefore, when a child is raised with two different languages and to a certain extent two different cultures, the obvious question is how it will identify itself. The five informants have five different answers to this question. While Ling suggests that her daughter will change identity, Sam believes that his son will have a mixed identity if he is accepted. María and Yuming both argue that their daughters will probably have different identities depending on context, while Zarah is raising her son to have a balanced identity.

Despite individual differences, all five informants go through a similar process. They are constantly faced with choices and are trying to find a balance between the two languages. Some, as María and Ling, feel as they are alone in their mission, while Sam is completely confident and believes that his son will speak both languages fluently. One major contributing factor to the different perspectives is the surrounding Swedish environment. Yuming, Zarah, María and Ling experience that their child is far more dominant in Swedish due to the impact of the environment, especially daycare. Each of them tries to find a way to balance the Swedish environment. For Yuming, María and Ling, the solution lies in travelling to back to the countries where they themselves have been raised. In contrast, Zarah has created a Somali environment for her son in order to balance the Swedish environment. Opposed to the female informants, Sam does not experience that his son is missing out on anything by being brought up in Sweden. On the contrary, he emphasises that English is a world language and is therefore everywhere.

Finally, it should be pointed out that raising a child is complicating to begin with. Hence, raising a child and trying to teach it two languages, as well as socialise it into two cultures does not make it easier. Still, most of the informants seem very anxious to raise their child to become bilingual and despite difficulties are determined to continue with their struggle. Some of them go to incredible lengths to achieve their goal. As Zarah expresses it:

There is no limit for how much I can teach him as a mother about my language and my background. That limit does not exist. He will have a part of me all his life and there is no limit that can take that away. I see it as it is a part of me that he takes with him when he learns Somali. [...] The limit for me to stop does not exist. Why have I started if I am going to stop?
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INTERNET SOURCES

URL1: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multilingual 2006.10.26