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Minority language development in early childhood: a study of siblings acquiring Bosnian and English in Ireland

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Abstract

This paper considers issues faced by multilingual families in supporting their children's acquisition of minority home languages. These include the challenges posed by majority language dominance in society and education, limited opportunities for minority language input and interaction, and possible differences in the language acquisition experience of siblings (De Houwer 2007; Barron-Hauwaert 2011; Bridges and Hoff 2014). The paper reports on a comparative case study which investigated the early childhood language development of two siblings acquiring Bosnian and English in Ireland. Based on audio and video recordings of the children in the home environment, it focuses on the acquisition of the minority language, Bosnian, by the eldest and youngest of three sisters. Following a previous study (Finnegan-Ćatibušić 2006), it compares the children's linguistic development in the minority language and how this may be influenced by discourse patterns in family interaction (Döpke 1992; Genessee 2002, 2008). The children's development of biliteracy (Cummins 2012) and community efforts to promote minority language maintenance are also discussed. Multilingualism is considered from an ecological perspective (Van Lier 2004; Creese and Blackledge 2010), exploring steps that families can take to create linguistic environments which support minority language development. This research is set in the context of an increasingly multilingual Ireland, in which migrant languages have been acknowledged as a 'resource' by the Department of Education and Skills (DES 2017). The study shows that children's multilingual development often occurs outside formal education, in family and community settings. Its findings indicate that, within the education system, there is a need for greater recognition of multilingualism from the early years and for the promotion of multilingual approaches to education (Kirwan 2013; Ćatibušić and Little 2014; Cummins 2015).

Keywords: *multilingualism, early childhood, minority languages*

1. Introduction

1.1. Multilingualism in Ireland

Due to rising immigration in recent decades, Ireland has become an increasingly multilingual country, with up to 200 languages in everyday use (DES 2014). The results of Census 2016 show that 612,018 persons speak a language other than English or Irish at home, an increase of 19% since 2011 (Central Statistics Office 2017). It is estimated that up to 12% of schoolchildren come from migrant backgrounds (DES 2014; Duncan 2015) and the primary school database (2016/17) indicates that almost 50,000 primary school pupils speak a language other than English or Irish as their mother tongue (O'Brien 2017).

This linguistic diversity has been acknowledged in the *Intercultural Education Guidelines* for primary and post-primary schools produced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA 2005, 2006), in the *Intercultural Education Strategy 2010–2015* (Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration 2010), and in the *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2016). However, despite these guidelines and strategies, there has been little practical support for the maintenance of migrant home languages in the educational context. For instance, while the new *Primary Language Curriculum* recognises that 'parents and the school can play a key role in celebrating and maintaining the child's home language' (NCCA 2015, p. 43), its 'integrated' approach to language learning focuses on the two official languages of education, English and Irish.

The recently published *Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017–2026* accepts that migrant languages 'constitute a new resource, as yet largely untapped, for Ireland' and that immigrant communities 'need to be supported in maintaining their own languages' (DES 2017, p. 14). This new strategy aims to diversify the range of languages offered in secondary schools, including the development of 'curricular specifications for heritage speakers for Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese' (ibid, p. 19).

Although the inclusion of some migrant languages in the post-primary curriculum is welcome, it is an insufficient response to linguistic diversity in Irish education, particularly since support for home language maintenance in early childhood and through the primary school years remains limited.

1.2. The value of multilingualism

Research indicates many potential advantages of growing up with more than one language, including cognitive (Bialystok, 2010; Calvo and Bialystok 2014), linguistic (Kopečková 2016; Cenoz 2013), and social and emotional benefits (Halle et al. 2014). However, as Sierens and Van Avermaet point out, there prevails a 'double-standards discourse regarding multilingualism and education' whereby knowledge of 'international prestige languages is highly valued as cultural capital' but multilingualism involving less prestigious minority languages is not valued (2015, p. 10). As a result, minority languages are positioned as having less socio-economic 'value' and 'use' (May 2009, p. 531) and often lack support within education systems.

The dominance and social prestige of a majority language, particularly within the educational context, can render languages spoken by migrants vulnerable to attrition (Thomauske 2011). However, 'language shift' is not an inevitable consequence of migration (Fishman 1991). Parental commitment, intergenerational and community support, and socio-economic factors have emerged as key influences on the development of home languages among children from migrant backgrounds (Suarez 2007). In considering minority language maintenance, it is therefore necessary to consider the home learning environment as a primary context for language acquisition (Hoff 2006). It is also important to recognise that aspects of this environment may be adjusted to promote language development, and that this can benefit the acquisition of home languages (Manz et al. 2016).

An ecological approach to multilingualism which regards language as 'activity in a meaningful environment' (Van Lier 2004, p. 80) is thus relevant to home language maintenance. This perspective involves awareness of the nature of the language environment, how languages may evolve within it, and how to counteract language endangerment (Hornberger 2011). It also involves questioning how 'processes of language use create, reflect, and challenge particular hierarchies and hegemonies' (Creese and Blackledge 2010, p.

104) and requires 'an exploration of the relationship of languages to each other and to the society in which these languages exist' (Creese and Martin 2003, p. 161). Cultivating linguistic ecosystems which reflect the multilingual identities of children from migrant backgrounds and which 'recognise and value community language and literacy practices and the role of the family' (Conteh and Brock 2011, p. 349) can support children's home language development. Furthermore, as an ecological perspective 'focuses attention on the personal and interactional processes of language development' (Van Lier 2004, p. 86) it can empower multilingual families. While patterns of language dominance in society may be beyond family control, supporting the 'micro end' of language development (ibid, p. 85) through meaningful use of the minority language in home, community and educational contexts could have lasting benefits for children's multilingualism.

1.3. Language learning environment in the home

Multilingual families often face challenges in supporting their children's development of minority languages. The majority language of the society in which they live may be dominant in education, peer groups, and the media. Family migration patterns can impact on home language development; children may be newly-arrived migrants or they may have been born to migrant parents. The availability and extent of minority language input is likely to influence children's acquisition of that language; studies have shown that children in families where two parents are speakers of the minority language are more likely to acquire this language than if only one parent is a minority language speaker (De Houwer 2007; Hoff et al. 2014).

Birth order may also impact on children's development of minority home languages; children who have older siblings already in majority language education tend to interact with these siblings through the majority language, so their acquisition of the home language may be less extensive than that of first-born children (Bridges and Hoff 2014). Home language maintenance among younger siblings growing up in a majority language dominant environment may therefore prove more challenging, although family dynamics vary (Barron-Hauwaert 2011).

Patterns of language use in the home are also likely to vary; some families in which there are two parents who speak different languages adopt a 'one-parent one language' (OPOL)

approach, other families favour a 'minority-language-at-home' approach (Barron-Hauwaert 2011). These patterns may change over time; it has been found that when children enter education, family interaction in the majority language tends to increase (Bridges and Hoff 2014). Research further suggests that, in contexts of majority language dominance, steps should be taken to maximise family engagement with the minority language (De Houwer 2007).

At a micro-level, features of family interaction may influence the child's acquisition of the minority language (Döpke 1992; Lanza 1997). Adopting a conversational orientation in interaction with the child and using 'insistence strategies' to elicit minority language production have been found to support home language development (Döpke 1992). The importance of play as a context for language acquisition should also be recognised (Leong and Bordova 2012; Patè 2009).

Growing up in a multilingual environment, children will engage in purposeful language mixing, often referred to as 'code-switching' (Genessee 2002, 2008). This 'systematic on-line co-ordination' of languages (Genesee 2002) also reflects children's socialisation in an environment in which they are exposed to and use different languages – or combinations of languages – in different contexts, with different interlocutors, for a wide range of communicative purposes (Genessee 2008). As it is part of the social reality of multilingualism, this flexible movement across languages, or 'translanguaging' (Garcia 2009), can be transformative as it enables children to draw on all their linguistic resources in ways that affirm their multilingual identities (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Blackledge and Creese 2015).

1.4. Beyond the home

Outside the family context, support for minority language development varies and, for many children from migrant backgrounds, it may be minimal. While there is a growing awareness of the advantages of multilingualism and recognition of the potential of home languages as a 'resource for learning' (Cummins 2005; Creese and Blackledge 2010), opportunities for home language use within the educational context are often very limited. For example, while recent guidelines and strategies pertaining to language and intercultural education in Ireland acknowledge the importance of home language maintenance, it is generally left to schools to take their own initiatives in supporting migrant languages. Although some schools have made

huge and rewarding efforts to include children's home languages in their education (Kirwan 2013), these tend to be exceptional cases and, overall, more multilingual approaches to education are required (Ćatibušić and Little 2014). As Cummins emphasises, 'the school must be proactive in communicating to students that knowledge of additional languages and cultures represents an intellectual accomplishment and social advantage' (2015, p. 459). Research shows that teaching through a 'multilingual' and 'intercultural lens' which integrates children's home language and cultural knowledge into classroom learning has proven benefits for academic achievement (ibid, pp. 459–460).

At community level, informal learning opportunities can also provide significant support for children's home language development. Complementary schools play an important role in maintaining home languages and connections to home language communities (Ruby and Kenner 2012); as such, they can be 'safe spaces for bilingual pupils' learning' (Conteh and Brock 2011, p. 355). They are also spaces in which children can express and develop their multilingual identities in new and creative ways (Creese and Blackledge 2011). In these contexts, 'flexible' rather than 'separate' approaches to multilingualism may best reflect the complex identities of multilingual children (Creese and Blackledge 2011; Reath Warren 2018).

By enhancing opportunities for home language use, both within and beyond the family context, it may thus be possible to nurture linguistic ecosystems that sustain multilingual development. The research discussed below will explore this issue, investigating efforts made by a family to support children's acquisition of a minority language, Bosnian, within an English dominant environment.

2. Sibling study

2.1. Aims and methodology

This research involved a comparative study of two siblings, the eldest and youngest of three sisters, acquiring Bosnian and English in Ireland. The older participant, Child A, was born in Japan, lived in Bosnia from the age of four months to two years, and grew up in Ireland from the age of two onwards. The younger participant, Child L, is seven years younger than Child A. She was born in Ireland and has lived there since birth. The participants have another sister who is almost three years younger than Child A and four years older than Child L. This study focuses on Child A and Child L as it concerns changes in language dynamics within the

family over a considerable period, between the birth of the eldest and youngest siblings, and how these may have impacted on the children's bilingual development. Acknowledging the limitations of small-scale case studies but also their potential to provide insights into lived experiences over time (Van Lier 2005), this research explores ways in which multilingual families may act to promote minority language maintenance within a majority language dominant society.

The data collected in relation to Child A includes regular diary entries from age 1;8 to 3;3 years and audio-recordings, generally weekly, from age 2;6 to 3;3 years (data collection period: 2001–2003). The data for Child L includes regular video recordings, every week or two weeks, and diary entries from birth to 2;6 years (2007–2009). Some later samples of the children's writing in Bosnian were also collected.

2.2. Family and community context

In this family, the languages of the home are Bosnian and English; the father comes from Bosnia and is a native speaker of Bosnian, the mother comes from Ireland and is a native speaker of English. While Child A spent most of her first two years in Bosnia, the family then moved to Ireland and the children have grown up in a society in which the dominant language is English. This study focuses on the children's bilingual development in the preschool years, during which time they interacted mainly with their parents, siblings, and their maternal grandparents. Before the age of two, Child A also had some interaction with her Bosnian-speaking relatives and childminder, although her English-speaking mother was a significant source of linguistic engagement. In summer visits to Bosnia both children have had the opportunity to interact with Bosnian-speaking family members. On entering education, from preschool onwards, the children have been immersed in an English-dominant educational and social environment.

As the family lives outside Dublin, the children have had limited opportunity for social interaction with Bosnian speakers other than their father. In Ireland, most Bosnians live in Dublin; the Bosnian community is small, with just 1,170 Bosnian speakers recorded in Census 2011 (Central Statistics Office 2011). Many first-generation Bosnians, including the children's father, arrived in the 1990s under a resettlement programme, established during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which brought around 1,000 refugees and their family members

to Ireland (Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration 2017). The family has strong links with the Bosnian community and as the children have grown older they have engaged in some community activities, for example, attending a Bosnian language school.

While the children are siblings, possible differences may arise in their individual experiences of bilingual development due to factors such as birth order, family movement, and efforts made by the parents to shape the language environment within the family. In the case of Child A, who was at a very early stage of bilingual development when the family returned to Ireland, the parents initially tended to speak their own languages to her. However, Child A also spent considerable time in the care of her English-speaking grandparents, and most resources in the home, for example, story books, were in English. This resulted in limited exposure to the minority language; Bosnian input came only from her father and was subject to time constraints. Her acquisition of English developed rapidly but her Bosnian language acquisition was slower, particularly her development of productive skills. As it appeared from this case that an OPOL approach was not sufficient to ensure minority language development, the parents began to explore how the language environment could better nurture their children's acquisition of Bosnian (Finnegan-Ćatibušić 2006).

In the case of the youngest sibling, Child L, the family was still living in the same English-dominant society with multiple sources of majority language input; her two older sisters had already entered preschool and primary education. However, the parents had made some changes to the linguistic ecosystem of the home to try to enhance the status of Bosnian as a 'family language'. This involved not only the father speaking Bosnian to the children but also the mother and siblings using Bosnian in family interactions, as well as travelling to visit relatives in Bosnia, sourcing children's books, films and music in Bosnian, and engaging in regular story-reading and games in Bosnian. By maximising interaction in the minority language within the home environment, it was hoped the children's bilingual development could be supported.

3. Findings

3.1. Child A

Analysis of the audio-recordings of family interaction for Child A, shortly after the family returned to Ireland, showed her rapid acquisition of English. By the age of three years, she

had a wide range of vocabulary in English (for example: 'scamper', 'pedantic', 'necessary')
and could produce complex structures:

Age 3;2 (talking to mother)

Child A: I was saying hello to the fly when he came into my room.

The recordings also indicated her developing comprehension of Bosnian. This was evident in
her understanding of question forms, ranging from the simple: *šta je ovo?* ('what's that?') at
age 2;6, to the more complex: *hoćeš li da* [NAME 1+NOM] *ide* [NAME 2+DAT] *da priča?*[1]
('do you want that NAME 1 goes to talk to NAME 2?') at age 3;2. Child A's use of Bosnian
in interaction with her father also increased, with lexical development apparent across
semantic fields such as food, clothes, toys, animals, colours, numbers, and familiar people
and places.

By age 3;0, evidence of Child A's Bosnian morpho-syntactic development was beginning to
emerge, for instance, in her production of simple structures:

Age 2;11 (asking for milk)

Child A: hoću mlijeko.

                Want-1P-PRES-SG milk

                'I want milk.'

She also began to make attempts at morphological marking, in a manner similar to
monolingual infants acquiring Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian (Anđelković 2000), with

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[1] Bosnian inflectional markings used in examples:

NOM:	nominative
DAT:	dative
ACC:	accusative
GEN:	genitive
MASC:	masculine
FEM:	feminine
SG:	singular
1P:	first person
3P:	third person
PRES:	present tense
NEG:	negative marker
Further note:	Bosnian is a pro-drop language which does not have articles

context of acquisition and phonological salience of the inflected form appearing to influence her efforts. Examples of her marking of adjectives, verbs and nouns for gender, number and case include:

Age 2;9   (looking at picture of lion)

Child A: žuti lav

yellow-MASC-NOM-SG lion-MASC-NOM-SG

'yellow lion.'

Age 3;0 (talking about photo)

Child A: čita knjigu

read-3P-SG book-FEM-ACC-SG

'she reads/is reading a book'

Child A also demonstrated awareness of her two languages, identifying Bosnian with father – for example, at age 2;7, referring to 'Dada's numbers' when her father was counting with her in Bosnian. Language awareness was also evident in her experimentation and play with words:

Age 2;11 (eating lollipop)

Child A: l is for lollipop, l is for *lizalo*

'lollipop'

Most of Child A's recorded Bosnian production up to age 3;2 constituted single word utterances or very short structures. However, she also produced mixed Bosnian/English utterances. Analysis of these mixed utterances found that, considering her more extensive English vocabulary, they generally involved 'lexical bootstrapping' (Genesee 2002) to fulfil a communicative purpose. Structurally, they conformed to the Matrix Language Frame model (Myers-Scotton 2002) suggesting that, while English was her dominant language, she could mix codes in a grammatically controlled and systematic way.

It also emerged from the recordings of Child A's language use, which focused on interaction with her father in Bosnian, that her language choice could be influenced by the interactive context. Interactions which involved direct engagement with the child through play or while

looking at a book with her father appeared to be most supportive of the child's development of Bosnian. Her use of Bosnian was further influenced by discourse patterns within these interactions. For instance, the father's greater insistence on the child's production of Bosnian rather than English utterances – through his use of a 'minimal grasp' strategy i.e. pretending not to understand English (Döpke 1992) – appeared more likely to generate responses in Bosnian from the child, as shown in the examples below:

Age 3;0 (asking for present)

Child A: I want it.

Father: šta? (father insists on Bosnian response)

                'what?'

Child A: I want a poklon.

                 'present.'

Age 3;2 (looking at picture of rabbit in book)

Father: a šta je ovo,

        'and what is this?'

Child A: rabbit

Father: šta je ovo?

        'what is this?'

Child A: zeko.

        'rabbit.'

Over the course of this study, the parents found that creating more opportunities for input and child-centred interaction in the minority language could better support Child A's acquisition of Bosnian.

3.2. Child L

Learning from the bilingual acquisition experience of Child A, the family began to adopt more holistic approaches to minority language maintenance. This resulted in the younger siblings being exposed to more Bosnian input and engaging in more interaction through Bosnian from an early age. Despite being the youngest child in the family and having grown up solely in Ireland, diary entries show that Child L's Bosnian vocabulary significantly

exceeded that of Child A by age 2 (see Table 1). While her lexical development in English was more extensive than her acquisition of Bosnian words, her combined vocabulary by age 1;9 exceeded that of her older sister by almost 100 words, due primarily to her lexical development in Bosnian.

It should also be noted that, in the case of Child A, as the parents became more aware of the importance of minority language maintenance, her Bosnian vocabulary also increased. In both cases, the children's productive vocabulary in Bosnian was predominately noun-based although their range of verbs, adjectives, and other lexical items widened over time.

Child L					Child A				
Age	Bosnian	English	Bosnian/ English	TOTAL	Age	Bosnian	English	Bosnian/ English	TOTAL
1;6	**32**	107	9	148	1;9	**12**	263	29	304
1;7	**48**	152	18	218	2;9	**57**			
1;8	**83**	189	20	292	2;11	**105**			
1;9	**124**	242	29	395	3;2	**185**			
1;10	**185**	336	33	554					

Table 1: Comparison of vocabulary development

The audio-visual recordings of Child L's family interaction further show how her proficiency in Bosnian had developed more extensively than that of Child A by the age of 2;6. As with Child A, interaction in playful settings promoting the use of Bosnian, and insistence on the use Bosnian for communication, appeared to support Child L's development of the minority language.

Age 2;0 (playing with father – naming parts of the body)
Father: a šta je ovo? (points to own eye – wearing glasses)
　　　 'and what's this?'
Child L:(makes shape of glasses with hand up to her eye) naočare!
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　 'glasses!'
Father: naočare (laughs) bravo!

    'glasses   well done!'

Child L:(stands up) I need naočare.

       'glasses.'

Father: i ti imaš naočare, gdje?

  'and you have glasses, where?'

Child L: I don't know.

Father: ne znam, je li? ne-

  'I don't know, is it? NEG-'

Child L:I don't know.

Father: šta, ne-

  'what, NEG-'

Child L: ne znam. (walks around looking for her sunglasses)

  'I don't know.'

Father: ne znam gdje su, je li?

  'I don't know where they are, is it?'

Child L: (walks around looking)…… em.. em.. I don't need them!

Father: ne trebam, ha? ne-

  'I don't need, eh? NEG-'

Child L: ne trebam. (shakes head and walks back to father)

  'I don't need.'

Exposure to Bosnian across a range of genres, for example, 'reading' Bosnian books together with her father, provided Child L with further opportunities for Bosnian language input and interaction. This included words and phrases associated with early literacy development, for example: *jednog dana* ('one day/once upon a time'). The extract below, from a conversation with her father while looking at a storybook, indicates that Child L had greater lexical and grammatical competence in Bosnian than Child A at the same age, 2;6 years. However, again her father had to guide the interaction to ensure use of the minority language:

Age 2;6 (reading 'Care Bears Storybook' in Bosnian with father)

Child L:(runs finger under words as if reading) eh.. jednog dana, Care Bear je-

       one-GEN-SG day-GEN-SG Care Bear is

      'one day/once upon a time Care Bear is-'

Father: me-

    'te-'

Child L: medo.. eh.. he's holding the kite.

    'teddy'

Father: šta?

    'what?'

Child L:zmaj.

    'kite.'

Father: šta? on.. dr-

    'what? he's hold-'

Child L: there's a- (points to rainbow in picture)

Father: on drži šta..

    'he's holding what..'

Child L: zmaj.

    'kite.'

Father: zmaj.

    'kite.'

Child L:I see a rainbow.

Father: šta?

    'what?'

Child L: on the kite.

Father: ne razumijem, šta? hajde na bosanskom, hajde.

    'I don't understand, what? come on in Bosnian, come on.'

Child L: na z-z-.. na zmaju.

    on (the) k-k-.. on (the) kite-DAT-MASC-SG

    'on the k-k-.. on the kite'

Father: šta? a šta je na zmaju?

    'what? and what's on the kite?'

Child L: duga! (points to picture of rainbow on kite).

    'a rainbow!'

Father: duga na zmaju, bravo!

    'a rainbow on the kite, well done!'

The parents also encouraged sibling interaction in Bosnian. In these contexts, the children often used their linguistic resources in creative ways, as shown in the interaction below involving Child L and her sister Child S (then aged 6;9 years). As well as the father, the older sister here provides Bosnian input which is then used by Child L:

Age 2;6 (playing together with Lego bricks)

Child S: CHILD L jel' ja mogu ovo? (asking for Lego brick)

'CHILD L can I have this?'

Child L: ne hvala. (does not want to give brick)

'no thanks.'

Father: ne hvala! (laughs)

'no thanks!'

Child S: (takes brick)

Child L: ne hvala! (grabs brick back)

'no thanks!'

Child S: je li možemo ovo? (asks for another brick)

'can we have this?'

Father: CHILD L- CHILD L-

Child S: je li možemo ovaj? (reaches and asks for a third brick)

'can we have this (one)?'

Child L: (pauses to decide) …… da.

'yes.'

Father: CHILD L-

Child S: hvala. (takes brick)

'thanks.'

Child L: it's like the same! (compares blue bricks, same shade)

Father: jel' to i- i-

'is that the s- s-'

Child S: isto!

'same!'

Child L: isto.

'same.'

Father: to isto, jeste.

   'it's the same.'

Child S: isto.

   'same.'

3.3. Sustaining minority language development

Although the research reported here focuses on the two participants' bilingual acquisition prior to entry into education, observations regarding the children's minority language development continued through their school years. Both children started preschool at around the age of 3;6 years and entered primary school one year later. In both cases, there was little recognition of minority home languages in either the preschool or the school environment. Peer interaction and engagement with societal influences, including media, was predominantly through the majority language. Nevertheless, the family continued to emphasise the role of Bosnian in the home and made efforts to support the children's biliteracy development by encouraging them to read and write in Bosnian (Cummins 2005, 2012; Hornberger 2012). The example below shows Child L's ability to write in Bosnian, with some support from her father regarding spelling and grammar, at age 7:

Sve o Meni!
1. Ime: CHILD L
2. Godina: 7
3. Godina počajna: 2015
4. Najomiljenija boja: Zelena
5. Najomiljenija knjiga: Vukovi Neba (Sky Wolves)
6. Boja oči: Smede
7. Boja kosu: Tamno smeda
8. Najomiljenija priateljica: FRIEND'S NAME
9. Moja učiteljica: Gospoda TEACHER'S NAME
10. Volim da radim: Volim da crtam i bojim i da se igram.

All about me!

1. Name: CHILD L
2. Age: 7
3. Year of starting: 2015
4. Favourite colour: Green
5. Favourite book: Sky Wolves
6. Colour of eyes: Brown
7. Colour of hair: Dark brown
8. Best friend: FRIEND'S NAME
9. My teacher: Mrs TEACHER'S NAME
10. (Things) I like to do: I like to draw and colour and play

The parents in this study were also involved in establishing a Bosnian complementary school in Dublin. This school ran on a voluntary basis from autumn 2012 to spring 2013. Lessons were delivered by a Bosnian teacher and used resources produced for children of the Bosnian diaspora. Attending the Bosnian complementary school had a positive impact on all three children in this family as interacting with other Bosnian-speaking children enabled them to further value their multilingual identities. The school was also important in supporting literacy development in Bosnian.

Classes were held at the weekend and were attended by a small number of children, although attendance varied. Those who attended were all second-generation children from the small Bosnian community in Ireland and they were more proficient in English than Bosnian (cf. Creese and Blackledge 2011). Most Bosnian parents had arrived as refugees in the 1990s,

when there was little recognition of the value of home language maintenance in Ireland and the acquisition of English was emphasised. Perceptions as to the 'value' of Bosnian in Irish society appeared to impact to some extent on parental engagement with the complementary school. However, the main challenges to the survival of the school related to lack of funding and problems finding a suitable location. Unfortunately, these challenges proved difficult to overcome and ultimately it was impossible to sustain this voluntary, community-run initiative.

Despite the closure of the complementary school, the children involved in this study continued to develop their Bosnian language skills. They have grown up strongly aware of their multilingual identities, as shown below in more recent examples of their reflective writing (recorded in 2017). However, as the wish expressed by Child L suggests, the children have experienced minimal recognition of their minority language in formal education.

Child A, aged 17:

> Ja se osjećam ponosna o mojoj tačnosti i tečnosti u Bosanskom jeziku. Ja mislim da je Bosanskom jedna o najvećih darova što su mi dali mojih roditelji. Zabavno je da pričam Bosanski i u svjetu koji stavlja ogromni pritisak na mlađe ljude da budu isti, Bosanski jezik mi pomaže da vidim da je uredu da budem malo drugačija. To iskustvo učenja jezika kod kuće je mi pomaglo puno, ne samo sa Bosanskim ali i sa drugim jezicima.
>
> Ja osjećam stvarno strogu konekciju sa Bosnom kao zemljom. Moja porodica ide u Bosnu samo jedanput godišnje, međutim moja svakodnevna upotreba Bosanskog jezika jača i raste tu vezu. Ja volim kako ja mogu da razumjem i da pričam na Bosanskom kada smo u Bosni.

I feel proud of my accuracy and fluency in Bosnian language. I think that Bosnian is one of the greatest gifts that my parents gave me. It's fun to speak Bosnian and in a world which puts enormous pressure on young people to be the same, Bosnian language helps me to see that it's OK to be a bit different. That experience of learning the language at home has helped me a lot, not just with Bosnian but with other languages.

I feel a really strong connection with Bosnia as a country. My family go to Bosnia only once a year, meanwhile my everyday use of Bosnian language strengthens and grows that connection. I love how I can understand and speak in Bosnian when we are in Bosnia.

Child L, aged 10:
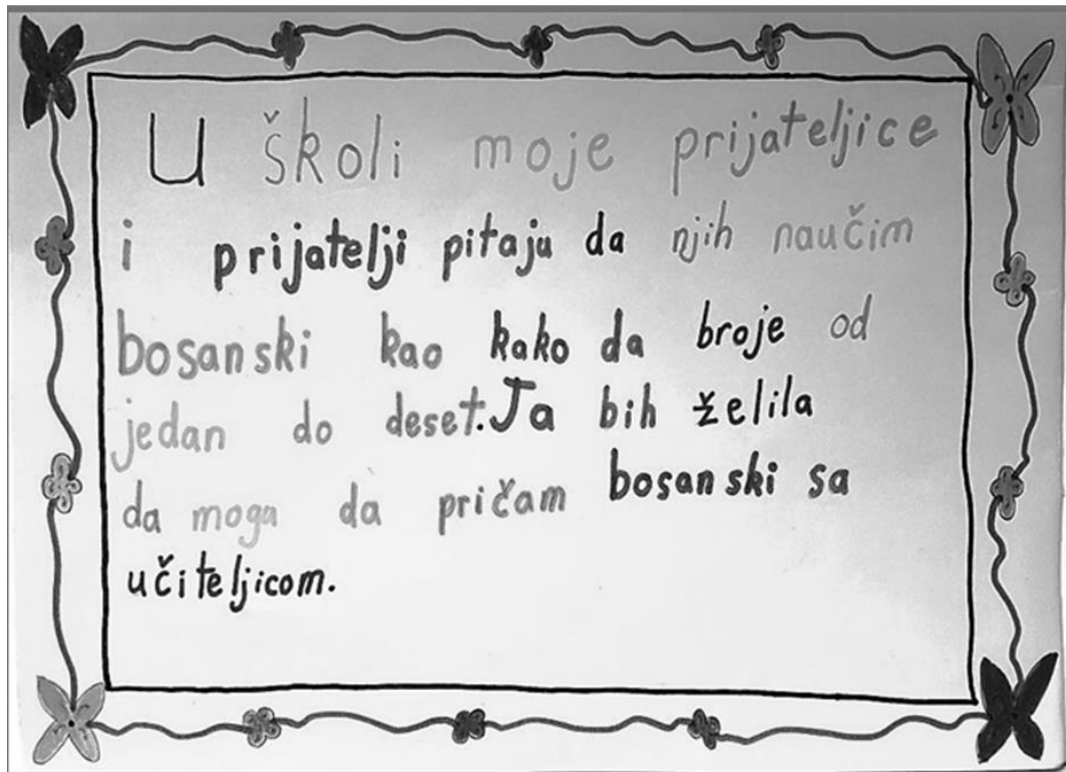
In school my friends (female and male) ask that I teach them Bosnian like how to count from one to ten. I would like that I could speak Bosnian with the teacher.

4. Discussion and implications

This study is a limited small-scale investigation of minority language acquisition by two siblings in Ireland. Nevertheless, its findings highlight the challenges faced by families trying to maintain minority languages within a majority language dominant society. These challenges can be particularly daunting for families in which one parent is the sole source of native-speaker input in the minority language. However, the study also shows that parents and families can develop flexible approaches which can alter the linguistic environment in the home in ways that nurture minority language development. Using the minority language as a 'family language' can have a positive impact on the bilingual development of all children in the family, including younger siblings.

The findings indicate the need to support families with home language maintenance by raising awareness of the advantages of multilingualism and providing practical guidance to parents. It is also important that the value of children's home languages is recognised in education from the early years. Within the Irish context, this means that multilingual

approaches to education should be encouraged (Kirwan 2013; Ćatibušić and Little 2014) and that schools should be pro-active in engaging with parents to support their children's home language development.

This requires capacity building, both through initial training and continuing professional development, to ensure that educators value multilingualism and view home languages as resources for learning (Cummins 2005, 2015). The commitment in the *Languages Connect Strategy* (DES 2017) to support migrant languages in the Irish education system is significant. However, as the findings of this study show, multilingual development in the early years is crucial to home language maintenance and therefore deserves more support in early childhood and primary education. Greater support for complementary schools (Kenner and Ruby 2012) is also required, especially for such initiatives within smaller language communities.

Respecting children's multilingual and intercultural identities involves creating linguistic ecosystems that sustain multilingual development (Creese and Blackledge 2010). The findings of this study indicate that small changes in the language environment can enhance children's home language acquisition and that educators should work together with families and communities to support multilingualism from the early years onwards.

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