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Parental Language Practices and Children’s Use of the Minority Language: the Mediating Role of Children’s Language Attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a bilingual environment does not necessarily imply speaking two languages (De Houwer, 2007 ; Pearson, 2007). While learning the majority language – i.e. official language of the country, the media, the education system and civil services (Hélot, 2007) – is easier for children, notably through school, the practice of the minority language is not systematic and some children decide not to speak it. The role of parents, and in particular their language practices at home, is one of the reasons given by De Houwer (2020) to explain the underlying causes of the problem of single-language use by children raised in a bilingual family context. According to Blanchet (2012), a minority language is collectively “minorated”, i.e. has a lower social status than another language, and “minoritised”, i.e. is less practiced (speakers, productions, interactions) than another language. A minority language could be considered a non-official language of the country (Fairclough & Belpoliti, 2016). In France, the state promotes monolingualism in French, whose hegemony increased over the course of the 20th century (Filion, 2021) leading to the minorization of languages, which legitimises and reproduces inequalities of access to power and resources for different minority language groups.

Researchers have been interested in minority language maintenance for several decades, and Family Language Policy (FLP) research attempts to understand why some children retain and use their minority language, while others “lose” it (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013, p.1). The focus has often been on the role of parents (ideologies, practices, language management) and research has mainly concentrated on children as passive receivers (Smith-Christmas, 2020).

However, the most recent works on FLPs recognise family as a dynamic system (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020), i.e. more and more studies are encouraging the recognition of children's agency in maintaining minority languages (Fogle & King, 2013; Smith-Christmas, 2020). This study examines whether and how children influence the way in which a minority language can (or cannot) be maintained. It provides new evidence in the context of France to highlight the role of parents' language practices in maintaining minority languages in children, while considering children as co-actors. We will use the term parental language practices to describe how parents use languages with their children at home. The literature shows that favouring the parent(s)'s use of the minority language at home would encourage children to use it in addition to the language used at school (De Houwer, 2007; Hoff et al., 2014; MacLeod et al., 2013; Pearson, 2007; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013), however, no research has been carried out on this issue in the French context. Children's agency will be illustrated through their language attitudes, as a child-related factor likely to influence language maintenance. While other research indicates that the attitudes of teenagers and adults towards a language are directly related to its use and learning (Blondin et al., 2008; Castellotti & Moore, 2002; Lasagabaster, 2006; Letsholo, 2009; Nguyen & Hamid, 2016), few studies examine children's attitudes towards their minority language, even though these are built up before adolescence (Riaño, 2006) and seem to play an important role in the maintenance of this language (Yang, 2021).

This study is guided by the following research question: do children's language attitudes mediate part of the relationship between parental language practices and children's minority language maintenance? More specifically, our first objective is to verify, in the French context, the results of De Houwer (2007) which show that increased use of minority language by the parents at home, increased children's use of this language. Our second objective is to examine the mediating role of children's language attitudes in the relationship, widely studied in research, between parents' language practices and children's language use. The role of children's language attitudes in this relationship was investigated using mediation analysis. More precisely, we focused on the role of the language attitudes of children in this association: the effect that passes through them (indirect effect) and the remaining effect between parental language practices and the child's use of the minority language (direct effect).

The Context of France

According to the latest figures from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), seven million immigrants live in France in 2021, or 10.3% of the total population. France is a country with a great linguistic diversity where 26% of the population is

bilingual, one out of four received from their parent a language other than French, in half of the cases a language of immigration. There are two types of languages in France: regional languages which include languages spoken in metropolitan France (Alsatian, Basque, Breton, Corsican, Catalan, Occitan, etc.) and Outre-mer (Creole, Mauritian, Malagasy, etc.), and foreign languages brought by migrations and/or learned at school (Arabic, Berber, Chinese, English, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, etc.) (Deprez, 2003). According to the Ministry of Culture (2016) and the National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED), the most widely spoken languages in France, apart from French, are dialectal Arabic (3 or 4 million speakers), Creole and Berber (2 million), Alsatian (548,000), Occitan (526,000), etc. Calvet (2016) points out that speakers of immigrant languages (Arabic, Soninke) are increasingly represented, unlike speakers of regional languages (Breton, Basque). Languages other than French have always been spoken in France, but some are depreciated because they are considered “poor”, “complicated to pronounce”, “without grammar”, and for these reasons, “useless” to teach at school, even “harmful” for the development of the child (Nocus, 2022). Some professionals even suggest that parents do not speak their minority language to their children to avoid disturbing them and causing language and/or academic difficulties (Nocus, *ibid.*). Advice that, Barontini (2016) reminds us, is given only about “discredited” immigrant languages. On the other hand, other languages can be seen as more prestigious, because they are considered as “languages of reason or knowledge”, which should be taught in schools (Nocus, 2022). For example, immigrant languages like African languages (Arabic, Wolof, Lingala, Malagasy, etc.) are minorated, whereas English or Spanish are popular and valued (Filhon 2021). The bilingualism of these migrant children is thus curbed, whereas it is encouraged for the elite and valued languages. At school, there are thousands of children whose family language is not French. The official language of instruction is French and since 2013, the teaching of a living language is compulsory from the first grade (1h30/week), in 90% of cases, English.

Parental Language Practices and Children’s Use of the Minority Language

According to Schwartz and Verschik (2013, p.1), family is “*a central position as a key prerequisite for maintaining and preserving languages*”. It is partly in their family environment that children find the indispensable incentives to speak the minority language (Dalgalian, 2000). In bilingual families, parents use and transmit their languages in a variety of ways; we generally distinguish three main types of practices (Grosjean, 2015; Hélot, 2007; Piller, 2001). The first, “one parent - one language” (OPOL), identifies families where each parent speaks their language exclusively. The child naturally receives dual exposure to both languages, but this

strategy seems difficult to maintain and the contribution of a single parent in the minority language would not be sufficient (De Houwer, 2007). The second, exclusive use of the minority language at home, is based on the hypothesis that the child will systematically learn the majority language through the school. The third approach, language mixing or “mixed strategy” identifies parents who use both languages in a mixed manner daily. This practice is by far the most common in bilingual families (Androutsou & Chatzidimou, 2022). Other approaches exist, although they are less widespread: for instance, the approach centered on the use of languages according to the time of day or the child's age (Grosjean, 2015).

These practices can be conscious or not and can play a significant part in the children's use of this language. In a study conducted in Belgium with 1899 families, De Houwer (2007) shows that a significant exposure to the minority language from parents is essential to support children's bilingual development: the more parents favour the use of the minority language, the higher the proportion of children use two languages. For instance, when both parents only use the minority language (MinL) at home (MinL+MinL profile), 97% of the children speak both the minority and majority languages. If one of the parents uses the majority language (MajL) in addition to the minority language (MinL/MajL+MinL profile), the proportion of children speaking both languages falls to 93%. When both parents use the majority language and only one of them uses the minority language (MinL/MajL+MajL profile), only 34% of the children say they use both languages. Furthermore, there is no significant difference between the first two profiles regarding the proportion of children who use both languages. Thus, the parents' use of the majority language does not threaten the transmission of the minority language. De Houwer (2007)'s findings call into question Ronjat's “one parent, one language” (OPOL) strategy and incite bilingual parents to mainly speak to their children in the minority language. Other research goes in the same direction: in MacLeod *et al.* (2013)'s study conducted on 9 simultaneous bilingual (French-German) children (mean age 59 months), 8 out of 9 families had developed the “one parent, one language” (OPOL) approach. The results show a correlation between the degree of exposure to the majority language and the child's proficiency in this language, but this correlation is not significant for the minority language. Hoff and colleagues (2014) also recommend a high exposure to the minority language from parents to support children's bilingual development. According to them, encouraging the native speakers, i.e. the parents, to use the minority language at home would help their children maintain it.

In summary, these studies show that parents' use of the minority language fosters their children's use or maintenance of it. However, according to Mishina-Mori (2011), parental

choices do not alone explain children's language choices. Bilingual development also depends on the perceptions children have of their language(s), i.e. their language attitudes.

Language Attitudes and Use of Minority Language

An attitude can be defined as a “*global and relatively lasting assessment that people make of objects, ideas or other people. They can be positive, negative or neutral and vary in intensity.*” (Petty et al., 2003, cited by Vallerand, 2006, p.237). A language attitude thus refers to a speaker's feeling towards their language(s) and that/those of others (Crystal, 1997, cited by Dweik & Qawar, 2015). Language attitudes can be constructed or deconstructed over time, depending on the child's language, social and family environment.

The values children associate with languages contribute to the maintenance and learning of the minority language and proficiency. According to Dalgalian (2000), children are affectively involved with their languages, either positively or negatively. Their language attitudes could thus be explained by the subjective values they associate with languages (Castellotti & Moore, 2002). In the context of learning a second language at school (L2), Blondin *et al.* (2008) show that when teenagers have very positive attitudes towards a language (usefulness of the language, sympathy for the country and its inhabitants) then they are more motivated to learn it. Conversely, when the language is perceived negatively, i.e. when they do not like it or find it unpleasant to hear, students say they have little motivation to learn it. Thus, an attitude can either be beneficial to the use and learning of a language or cause its disappearance (Castellotti & Moore, 2002).

Letsholo (2009) interviewed 232 Bakalanga youths, aged 17-25 years, and living in Botswana about their attitudes towards Ikalanga (minority language), and the official languages of the country (Setswana and English), as well as their use of these languages. 26% of the participants feel “ashamed”, “embarrassed”, or “guilty” about speaking Ikalanga. Nevertheless, over a half of the participants (53%) are in favour of language diversity in their family. 43% want to transmit Ikalanga to their future children in addition to Setswana and/or English. The author concludes that “*if the youth embrace a language and see value in it, they are likely to maintain the language and hence pass it on to their children*” (Letsholo, 2009, p. 593) The maintenance of minority languages is thus partially linked to the subjective values attributed to them. In Nguyen and Hamid (2016)'s more recent study, the majority of Vietnamese teenagers interviewed express a positive attitude towards their minority language (Rengao, Bahnar, Jarai, Halang). They say that speaking it is a marker of their ethnic identity and practicing it is important to preserve their cultural specificities. In parallel, they consider that speaking

Vietnamese (the majority language) is an important factor of social, academic, professional, and financial success. Positive attitudes towards languages play a fundamental part in their preservation but they might not be sufficient to preserve and maintain minority languages because of possible discrepancies with its use. Speakers of a minority language may have a positive attitude towards it without using it in their daily lives (Nguyen & Hamid, 2016). These findings are consistent with Alshafi (2020)'s work with Saudi Arabian adults aged 17 to 55: their positive opinions regarding each language depend on specific needs: while Arabic (majority language) is essential on a social (integration, education) economical and religious level, Rohingya (minority language) is important in relation to family and ethnicity. Among Arabic-speaking adults living in Quebec, Dweik and Qawar (2015) also show that the use of Arabic (minority language) was related to the family domain, social relationships, and sense of ethnic identity while English and French (majority languages) were instead considered important for education and work. These results indicate that speakers' perceptions of the role of each language in different situations are also important.

The role of parental language practices and attitudes, and society in the development of children's language attitudes

Transmission of the minority language can only take place if the parents see value or benefit in it (Letsholo, 2009). Many studies in FLP state that parents' positive attitudes towards the minority language influence their practices are beneficial to the child's bilingualism (Letsholo, 2009; López, 2005; Makarova et al., 2019; Park & Sarkar, 2007). For example, López, (2005) shows in 12 Anglo-Hispanic families in the U.S. that mothers' positive attitudes and beliefs about languages promote their child's bilingual development. More recently, Makarova and colleagues (2019) confirm that parents' positive attitudes toward a minority language promote its transmission, which affects children's proficiency in that language. The language practices of parents are therefore partly based on their attitudes, which are important for the transmission and maintenance of minority languages in children. Furthermore, these practices are not only a private matter, they are also closely related to social, educational and economic prestige (Curdt-Christiansen, 2015; King & Fogle, 2013) and the less positively a language is perceived by society, the harder it will be for parents to use it at home (Ghimenton, 2015). For example, in their longitudinal study conducted with 72 mothers and their children (4.1 years old at the start of the study) living in Pennsylvania, Hammer *et al.* (2009) show that the percentage of mothers who speak English (majority language) to their children has increased

over the three years of follow-up, while that of mothers who speak Spanish (minority language) has decreased between the 1st and the 2nd year. All the children attended school and were taught by teachers who used English as the primary language of instruction. The authors suggest that the mothers' choice to increasingly use English is influenced by “*the wider community and the educational system*” (Hammer et al., 2009, p. 114). Curdt-Christiansen (2015) indicates, in her study on three multilingual families in Singapore, that even if the parents express positive attitudes towards their minority language (Mandarin, Malay and Tamil), the social ideologies surrounding it can constrain their actual practices. Therefore, over the past thirty years, Singaporean families have gradually stopped using the minority languages at home, in favour of the official language, English, which “*enjoys a privileged position as the language of law, administration and commerce*” (Curdt-Christiansen, 2015, p.1). Society's attitudes to languages also shape the actual practices of early childhood educators and education professionals in ways that can go against or in favour of minority languages (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Armstrong de Almeida, 2006), which in turn can influence parental language practices. When citizens and public institutions do not support families' minority languages, the chances that parents will pass these languages on to their children diminish (Ghimenton, 2015). When the minority language inflow is reduced, children have fewer occasions to use it, which could negatively affect their linguistic representation of it (Paradis, 2011). Moreover, when parents relay society's negative image of the minority language, children risk internalising these negative values and no longer wanting to speak this language later on (Dalgalian, 2000). Yang (2021) noticed in interviews conducted with Australian children of Chinese origin (aged 4 to 16) that when family members share positive attitudes towards Chinese (the minority language), not only does it foster this family's use of Chinese, but also the children's positive perception of this language. “*There is no doubt that attitudes are directly influenced by [a factor] as powerful as the family*” (Lasagabaster, 2006, p. 394). However, other factors may play a role in the development of children's language attitudes and practices, such as friends, peers, media, and school (Lasagabaster, *ibid.*). For example, children may refuse to use their minority language at home if that language is looked down on by their peers (Ghimenton, 2015). More largely, society's positions on language could also affect children.

The Present Study

The present study is in line with the new questions at stake in the FLP research field, which concern children's agency in maintaining their minority languages. For a long time, FLP studies have considered children as passive receptors, which has had an effect on the

methodologies used to study them (Palviainen, 2020). Studies on children's agency have become more numerous, but their growing evolution has not always been accompanied by methodologies that take into account children's perspectives and are adapted to their level of development (Palviainen, 2020). The child's point of view is often measured indirectly (e.g. observation) and is often based on indicators provided by adults (often parents) (Smith-Christmas, 2017). Few FLP studies have involved children's points of view, despite the fact that their ability to act has become a key issue, and that children are considered competent to talk about themselves; they are the best informed about what they experience (Fuchs, 2005, cité par Bratož et al., 2021). As a result, questions relating to children's point of view in the transmission and maintenance of a minority language remain partly unanswered, since on the one hand FLP research places greater emphasis on the role of parents and society, and on the other hand, few methodologies have been developed to gather children's point of view. Considering children and what they have to say is not only an adult's role, but also children's right to be heard and considered (Annual report on children's rights, 2020). In this perspective, children's language attitudes were evaluated in order to illustrate child agency. According to Smith-Christmas (2017, p.23), developing « *research that is designed explicitly to elicit the child's views of the language would be particularly fruitful in expanding the field* ». To our knowledge, few studies have been carried out on young children's attitudes towards their minority languages, in contrast to studies on adults or teenagers, or on attitudes towards learning a foreign language at school. Few FLP's studies have taken into consideration children's views of their language, even though linguistic attitudes are constructed before adolescence (Riaño, 2006) and that this aspect seems to play an important role in the maintenance of the language (Letsholo, 2009; Nguyen & Hamid, 2016). Keeping in mind that attitudes are learned in a specific political, ideological, familial and cultural context and that it is important to study language attitudes across ages, countries and cultures (Bratož et al., 2021).

Since new research tends to consider children as co-actors in the maintenance of minority languages, we were interested in the mediating role of children's point of view when looking at the effect of parental language practices on children's use of the minority language. Our first objective is to verify De Houwer's (2007) findings in the French context regarding the role of parents' language practices in children's maintenance of minority languages. Our second objective is to examine the mediating role of children's language attitudes in the relationship between parents' language practices and children's language use. Two hypotheses were established:

Hypothesis 1: in the French context, the use of the minority language by parents at home increases children's use of this language (H1).

Hypothesis 2: The link between family language practices and children's use of the minority language is mediated by children's attitudes towards this language (H2).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study involved 135 children (82 girls and 53 boys¹) aged between 10 and 12 ($M=10.76$ years, $SD = 0.38$) living in a bi/multilingual family and attending Year 6 classes (CM2, 5th Grade) in 13 schools of the Loire-Atlantique department (France). 83 children go to state schools located within the high-priority education network (REP+²), 44 outside of REP/REP+, and 8 in private schools. The families speak one or two languages at home; the minority language³; the majority language: French; or a combination of the two languages. Most of these children come from North Africa, Arabic-speaking immigrant families (49 %). No children in this study reported speaking a metropolitan regional language. For the participants, school is compulsory from the age of 6⁴ to 16 and they learn French as soon as they start school. Most children are also exposed to French through the media, and some are exposed at home either through their father, their mother, or both. Finally, according to the teachers, none of the children have special educational needs and all have lived in France for at least two years or were born in France.

Measures

Question on Children's Use of the Minority Language

To identify whether the child speaks a minority language in addition to French, they answer the question "What language(s) do you speak?" by choosing: "Always French" or "French and another language". They must then specify the name of their minority language. No children had difficulty naming their language.

¹ The gender of the student was determined by the examiner and no non-binary options were offered to the children.

² The REP+ networks have the greatest concentration of social difficulties that have a strong impact on academic success.

³ List of minority languages represented in the study: Albanian, Arabic, Comorian, Creole, Fon-Gbe, Ingush, Italian, Khmer, Kurdish, Lingala, Mauritanian, Malagasy, Moldavian, Peul, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Sango, Soninke, Soussou, Spanish, Turkish, Wolof.

⁴ As of the start of the 2019-2020 school year, education is mandatory from age 3, not age 6 (article L. 131-1 du Code de l'éducation, tel qu'issu de l'article 11 de la loi n° 2019-791 du 26 juillet 2019).

Questionnaire on Parental Language Practices

The children answered a question about the language(s) spoken by their mother and father. We chose to question the children rather than parents by questionnaire because we found in our previous studies that many parents did not complete the questionnaires. They answer the question “What languages are spoken at home?” by choosing for each parent: “Always French”; “French and one or several other languages”; “Never French, but one or several other languages”. They must then specify what language(s). Four parents’ language use profiles were identified, like those proposed by De Houwer (2007) (see table 1).

Table 1.

Categorization of parents' language use profiles based on children's responses to the question: *What languages are spoken at home?*

Profiles	Children's answers	
	Parent 1	Parent 2
1. MinL/MinL	Never French, but one or several other languages	Never French, but one or several other languages
2. MinL₊MajL/MinL	French and one or several other languages	Never French, but one or several other languages
3. MinL₊MajL/MinL₊MajL	French and one or several other languages	French and one or several other languages
4. MinL₊MajL/MajL	French and one or several other languages	Always French

Note. MinL: minority language; MajL: majority language

Scale of Children’s Attitudes towards Their Minority Language

To study linguistic attitudes, researchers have made extensive use of observation. However, this indirect measurement poses methodological problems because the observation of an individual's behaviour is not always representative of their attitudes (Bratož et al., 2021). In addition, many studies have questioned parents about their children’s attitudes. As the population under consideration (10-year-olds) is able to directly answer questions about their attitudes (Bratož et al., 2021), we questioned them directly with a self-assessment scale. Inspired from the “attitudes” sub-scale of Chapman and Tunmer (1995)’s “Reading self-concept scale” and adapted by Nocus and collaborators (2012), the attitudes scale⁵ is initially composed of 9 items apprehending global representations children have of their minority language (e.g. “Speaking the minority language well is important for making friends; studying;

⁵ Since the completion of this study (early 2019), Bratož and colleagues (2021) have validated a very interesting multidimensional scale to identify Slovenian children's attitudes toward their languages (LANGattMini).

raising one's children"). For each item, they must choose their answer on a four-point scale from 1 (not very important) to 4 (very important).

Protocol

Schools were randomly selected in the Loire-Atlantique region (France). After obtaining children's consent and the written parental agreement, the data were collected in accordance with the code of ethics for psychologists (2012). The data collection lasted for three years (2019 to 2021), and the questionnaires were administered to the children during an individual administration conducted in a room isolated from the rest of the classroom. The examiners read the items aloud and recorded the children's responses on the questionnaires. They used only French during the examinations.

Statistical analysis

The first hypothesis (H1) of the study was tested using a Chi-square test which allowed the profiles to be constructed according to the parents' different language practices. The second hypothesis (H2) investigated whether the relationship between parents' and children's use of the minority language is mediated by children's attitudes towards it (see for example Hayes 2018). This analysis aims to identify what in children's use of the minority language is directly attributable to parental language choices (direct effect) and what is mediated by children's language attitudes (indirect effect of parental language practices on children's use of the minority language via parental language attitudes). To assess these effects, we used linear regression to predict children's attitudes towards the minority language as a function of their parents' language practices and logistic regression to predict children's use of the minority language as a function of their parents' language practices and their own attitudes towards it.

FINDINGS

Preliminary Analyses

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using JASP (0.16.2) software to test the hypothesized unifactorial structure of the minority language attitude scale and to determine its psychometric qualities in terms of internal consistency. The scale was initially designed with 9 items. The results indicate that only six items can be summed up by this one dimension (see factor weights, table 2). Three items are excluded: *“Speaking the minority language well is important for living in France; practicing one's religion; communicating with*

people who speak the same language.” The Cronbach's alpha value of .71 and the intra-class correlation coefficient of .29, indicate that the scale has good internal consistency (Kline, 2016). The minority language attitude score is the average of the six items, a high score reflecting a positive attitude.

Table 2

Factor loadings of the items of the one-dimension scale assessing children’s language attitudes

	Factor
Item 1 <i>Making friends and talking with them</i>	.42
Item 2 <i>Studying</i>	.61
Item 3 <i>Finding a job and making a living</i>	.57
Item 4 <i>Communicating with one’s family</i>	.46
Item 5 <i>Raising one’s children and educating them well</i>	.57
Item 6 <i>Travelling</i>	.57

Table 3 provides the descriptive analyses of the children's attitudes towards their minority language according to the other variables of interest. A Student's t test did not reveal a significant difference between boys and girls in their attitude towards their minority language ($t(133) = -1.197, p = 0.233$). Gender was therefore not controlled in the following analyses.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics (N=135)

	Children’s attitudes towards their minority language				
	N	Gender		Score	Standard deviation
		G	B		
School stratum					
State schools outside of REP+	44	28	16	2.36	0.64
REP+ state schools	83	50	33	2.59	0.69
Private schools	8	4	4	3.02	0.45
Children’s use of the minority language					
Yes	115	70	45	2.61	0.67
No	20	12	8	2.13	0.62
Parents' Language Use Profiles					
Profile 1	10	7	3	2.77	0.83
Profile 2	12	5	7	2.87	0.65
Profile 3	90	58	32	2.56	0.65
Profile 4	23	12	11	2.20	0.67

Use of the Minority Language by Parents and Children (H1)

Table 4 displays the children’s use of the minority language according to the parents’ use: When both parents use only the minority language (profile 1), 100% of children say they use it, while only 52% say they use it when only one parent uses the minority language in addition to the majority language (profile 4). A chi-square test reveals that the children’s language practices differ significantly as function as the parents’ profiles ($\chi^2(3, N = 135) = 24.50, p < .001$), verifying the study’s first hypothesis. However, the fourth profile is the only one that differs significantly from the three others.

Table 4.

Use of Languages by Parents and Children

Profiles	Proportion of children using the minority language	Proportion of children not using the minority language	n
1. MinL/MinL	100 % (n = 10)	0 % (n = 0)	10
2. MinL±MajL/MinL	91,67 % (n = 11)	8,33 % (n = 1)	12
3. MinL±MajL/MinL±MajL	91,11 % (n = 82)	8,89 % (n = 8)	90
4. MinL±MajL/MajL	52 % (n = 12)	48 % (n = 11)	23

Note. N = 135; MinL: minority language; MajL: majority language

Following this analysis, the “parental language practices” variable was broken down into two modalities. The modality "0" corresponds to families in which one of the two parents speaks only the majority language (profile 4) and modality "1" includes all the other families (profiles 1, 2, 3).

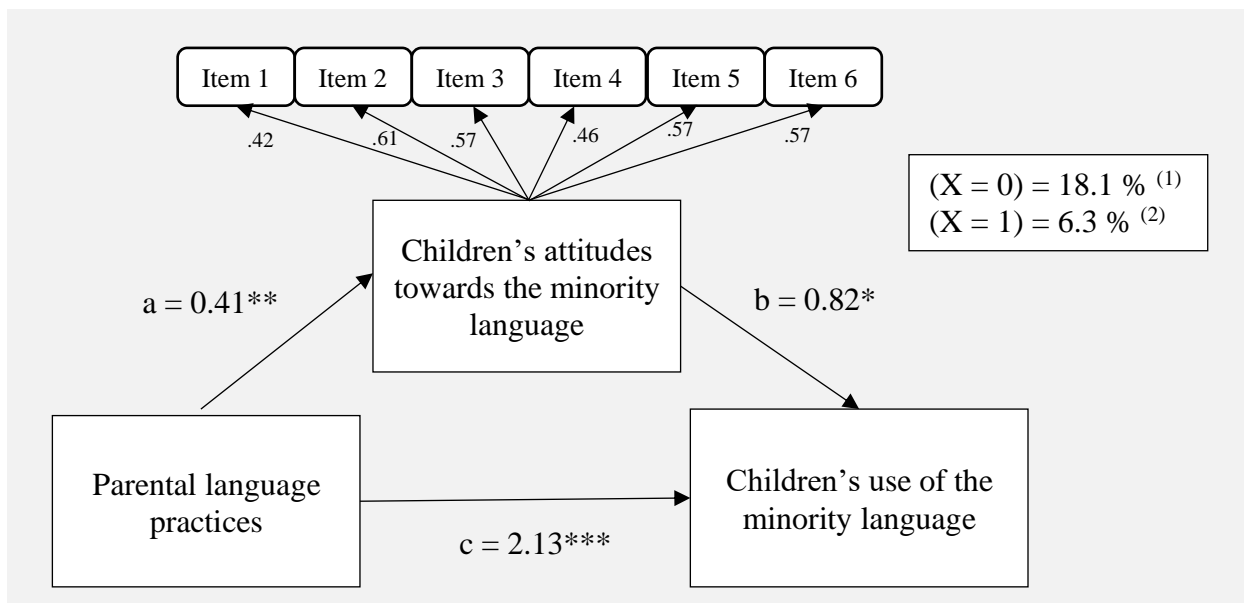
Mediation Analysis (H2)

The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Figure 1. Linear regression shows that parental language practices predict children's language attitudes, $F(2,132) = 7.30, p < .01, R^2 = .052$. Parents’ language choices ($OR^6 = 8.43, p < .001$) and the children’s attitudes towards their minority language ($OR = 2.26, p < .05$) predict their use of the minority language. We can note that this model has a good sensitivity of 96% (Agresti, 2007).

⁶ OR = Odds ratio

The two indirect effects of the parents' language practices on their children's are significant and positive ($NIE(1) = .028, p < .05$ and $NIE(0) = .071, p < .05$). The second hypothesis is verified. More precisely, for children in families where one parent speaks only the majority language, 18.1 % of the relationship between the parental language practices and the children's use of the minority language is mediated by the children's attitudes towards this language. By contrast, for children whose parents use the minority language exclusively or alongside the majority language, only 6,3% of the relationship between the parental language practices and the children's use of the minority language is mediated by the children's attitudes towards this language. Attitudes thus play a more important role in the children's use of the minority language in families where one parent speaks only the majority language.

Figure 1. Mediation model of the relationship between parental language practices and children's use of the minority language via their attitudes towards this language, with regression coefficients



Notes. ***significant at the 0.001 level; ** significant at the 0.01 level; *significant at the 0.05 level.

a, b and c are the estimates of a logistic regression allowing us to define the mediation model

⁽¹⁾ Proportion mediated by language attitudes for modality "0"

⁽²⁾ Proportion mediated by language attitudes for modality "1"

DISCUSSION

The majority of FLP's research investigates how the minority language maintenance of children growing up in a bilingual environment is related to parents' practices, which in turn are related to their language intentions or ideologies (King & Fogle, 2013). These questions have been the subject of several studies, but few have taken into consideration children's view of

their language. Today, FLP research has set itself the challenge of taking into account the child's role in language maintenance (Smith-Christmas, 2020). It is crucial to expand knowledge of children's agency by providing empirical evidence of the role they can play in maintaining their minority language. Using developmental psychology methodologies for collecting children's voices is one way of meeting the new challenges of FLP. Children must be considered as actors in their bilingual development and special attention must be given to them in conjunction with the FLP field. Moreover, these questions have been very little studied in France and through a quantitative approach.

It appears that, out of the 135 children, 15% say they do not use the minority language even though at least one of their parents uses it at home. This result is consistent with the finding that growing up in a bilingual environment does not systematically mean speaking two languages (De Houwer, 2007; Pearson, 2007) and confirms the relevance of studying the factors that help maintain the minority language in children. Additionally, this study shows there is no significant difference between profiles 1 (MinL/MinL), 2 (MinL+MajL/MinL) and 3 (MinL+MajL/MinL+MajL). Thus, the use of the majority language by one or both parents does not impede the children's choice to use the minority language, as long as it is practiced with the minority language (De Houwer, 2007). The results indicate that the use of the minority language by both parents at home fosters the maintenance of this language in children. Indeed, if both parents use the majority language and only one uses the minority language then this will have a negative impact on the child's use of the minority language.

Second, the results reveal that in addition to parents' language choices, children's language attitudes predict children's use of the minority language. Similar to studies in adults and adolescents (Alsahafi, 2020; Dweik & Qawar, 2015; Letsholo, 2009; Nguyen & Hamid, 2016) and those on learning a second or foreign language at school (Blondin et al. 2008), more positive the children's attitude towards their language is, the more likely they are to use it. In the same manner that parental language attitudes play an important role in their use and transmission of languages to their children (Letsholo, 2009; López, 2005; Makarova et al., 2019; Park & Sarkar, 2007), children's language attitudes toward their minority language are a key factor in their use. Additionally, the more parents use the minority language at home, the more children express a positive attitude towards this language. This finding is consistent with Yang (2021)'s study, suggesting that the way parents use and negotiate languages at home can have a positive or negative impact on children's attitudes towards their language. Furthermore, the results of the mediation analysis shows that the link between parental language practices and children's use of the minority language is partially mediated by children's attitudes towards

this language. The link between parents' and children's language choices is therefore more complex than a simple cause-and-effect relationship, as children's attitudes can redefine this link. More precisely, their attitudes mediate a more important part of this relationship in families where one parent speaks only the majority language. This interesting and innovative result suggests that the role of children's language attitudes on their language choices is more important when both parents use the majority language and only one uses the minority language. It invites us to consider child's perspective when looking at the effect of parental practices on children's minority language maintenance. Their language attitudes must therefore be considered to help them maintain their minority language. Maintaining minority languages would provide children with a strong emotional and cultural reference point that can promote cohesion within a multicultural family and the quality of intra-family relationships (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). The quality of the relationship that children have with their parents contributes to their well-being (Coudronnière et al., 2015). For example, a recent study in France shows that children who prefer to use their minority language at home have better life satisfaction than those who do not (Humeau et al., 2023). Therefore, reinforcing children's positive attitudes towards their language would be essential to the maintenance of their language but more largely to their well-being.

Finally, these results are consistent with Curdt-Christiansen's (2013) finding that studying the transmission of minority languages within families is a complex undertaking. The maintenance of minority languages and the establishment of FLPs are dynamically influenced by many internal and external factors (Spolsky, 2004; Wang & Hamid, 2022). The present study provides empirical evidence that children's ability to act (internal factor) is important to consider when looking at minority language maintenance. Children's views and language attitudes must therefore be taken into account to explain the link between parental language practices and the fact that some children retain and use their minority language, while others do not. This finding is consistent with Said and Zhu (2019) who show through their study of an Arabic and English-speaking family in the United Kingdom, that children have an important role to play in the use of their minority and the implementation of FLP in the family. A flexible FLP that considers children's preferences would create positive experiences of bilingualism (Said & Zhu, 2019), which are known to contribute more broadly to family well-being (De Houwer, 2019). However, neither children's language attitudes nor parents' language practices alone can explain the maintenance of minority languages. While decisions about language choices are made within the family, and the role of children is important, external pressures are

exerted on bilingual families, and micro- and macro-social realities are important to consider (Wang & Hamid, 2022).

Limitations

Despite its interesting findings, this study has limitations. Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly disrupted data collection and reduced the number of responses from families, resulting in significant missing data on the families' migration background, family form (two-parent, single-parent separated or blended families) and socioeconomic status (SES). It would thus be important to take these variables into account in future research. Secondly, the study is based solely on the answers children gave to questionnaires that are vulnerable to the social desirability bias (Bratož et al., 2021). To limit the impact of this factor and to control for possible underreporting of minority language use among children, it would have been relevant to complete this study with semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observation of the parents and their children. Finally, the literature suggests that favouring the use of the minority language at home increases children's proficiency in this language (Hoff et al., 2014) and that attitudes towards a language are directly linked to the proficiency level acquired (Lasagabaster, 2006; Letsholo, 2009; Nguyen & Hamid, 2016). It would thus be interesting to conduct research including this individual variable. All these factors, which were not measured in our study, should have been control variables included into the mediation model.

CONCLUSION

This study conducted with 10-year-old children in France shows that parents' language choices do not alone explain their children's. Children's language attitudes are important, especially when both parents use the majority language and only one uses the minority language. Minority language maintenance is not only a reflection of how parents feel about the language, how they use it, and how hard they work to maintain it. Children also have a role in the development of their bilingualism, and when the child's bilingual development is not supported by active language use by both parents at home, the children's attitudes are even more crucial and decisive. The success of minority language transmission therefore depends not only on the parents but also on the children, hence the importance of taking into account children's perspective when addressing minority language maintenance issues (Ghimenton, 2015).

Children's language attitudes must therefore be considered to help them maintain their minority language. Strengthening children's positive attitudes toward their language would therefore be a way to promote the use of their minority languages and preserve their family

relationships. Therefore, the valorization of those languages should be encouraged in sectors such as the media, education, and public services. For example, when children feel like their minority language is respected at school, they tend to reject it less (De Houwer, 2020a). School could thus participate in developing positive points of view on children's language diversity to ward off the threats hanging over their languages and cultural identity, by creating resources for the maintenance of languages (Faneca et al., 2016). Finally, children should be acknowledged as stakeholders of their bilingual development. It is essential to support the maintenance of their minority language by fostering the development of positive attitudes, thanks to a cooperation between their various environments (parents, school, public policies, community) (Nupus & Riandi, 2021).

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