

'Stop Doing That, *Ia Komu Skazala!*': Language Choice and Emotions in Parent–Child Communication

Aneta Pavlenko

Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

The goal of this paper is to discuss the role of emotion-related factors in language choice in bi- and multilingual families. Most of the time, factors other than emotions govern language choice and use in such families, among them language dominance, social context and linguistic competence of the interlocutors. However, quantitative and qualitative analyses of bi- and multilingual parents' webquestionnaire responses suggest that perceived language emotionality and affective repertoires offered by particular languages also play a role in language choice and use in parent–child communication, in particular in emotional expression.

Keywords: language choice, emotions, emotional expression, bilingual families

Introduction

In monolingual communication, emotions can be conveyed directly (I am angry) or indirectly (You are such an IDIOT!), with a variety of linguistic and paralinguistic cues available for performing affect. In multilingual contexts, speakers have one more resource at their disposal, linguistic juxtaposition, whereby affect can be signalled through language choice, codeswitching, and language play. 'Stop doing that, *ia komu skazala!* (literally: who am I talking to!)', I yell in a mix of English and Russian, when my son throws his yo-yo all around the living room, narrowly missing fragile objects. '*Umnitsa moia, lapushka* (my bright little paw)', I coo when he brings home an 'A' on the science exam. And yet our home language is mostly English, while Russian, my first language (L1) surfaces to signal more intense affect, be it positive and negative. What my English-dominant son responds to is not necessarily the meaning of the Russian expressions, but the fact that I have switched into my L1, which signifies that I 'mean it'.

Studies of codeswitching have long established that bilinguals may codeswitch to mark an affective stance. Speakers may switch into L1 to signal intimacy, we-ness, or to express their emotions, and to the second language (L2) to mark distance, an out-group attitude, or to describe emotions in a detached way (cf. Gumperz, 1982; Zentella, 1997). They may also mix two or more languages to convey intimacy or distance, as identities and group boundaries are constructed in interaction and are not always straightforwardly linked to a single language or language variety (cf. Sebba & Wootton, 1998). To date, however, language choice in emotional expression and the affective function of codeswitching have been examined only as a peripheral issue in codeswitching studies (cf. Breitborde, 1998; Grosjean, 1982; Scheu, 2000). No

systematic investigations known to this researcher focus on the influence of affective factors on language choice in bilingual talk (here and further on the term 'bilingual' will be used in accordance with the common usage in the field to refer to users of two or more languages).

To examine the role of affective factors in bilingual talk, the present study focuses on one linguistic space, the private space of the bi- or multilingual family, where communication is often fraught with emotions, conveyed not only through prosody or lexical choices, but also through language choices and codeswitching. The investigation is further narrowed to parental choices in parent-child communication, asking in particular what it means for parents to be raising a child or children in a language different from the one they themselves were socialised into. Is it true that L1 is the language of emotions and L2 the language of detachment in parent-child communication? Do all bilingual parents prefer their L1 for emotional expression? And if not, how do bilinguals use their multiple affective repertoires? And is there a language one can use to get the kids to finally, please, finally clean that room?

Language Choice in Bi- and Multilingual Families

The present study will examine language choices in bi- and multilingual families, i.e. families where more than one language is used by at least some of the family members. Two types of choices will be considered: overall and local. Overall choice will refer here to the language choice or choices consciously made by the parents for daily communication with the child or children, while local, or interactional, choices will refer to choices made for particular speech acts, consciously or spontaneously. Particular attention will be paid to codeswitching, i.e. choices which diverge from the home language or from the base language of the interaction.

The overall choice or choices are typically examined in studies of *private language planning* (Piller, 2001), language socialisation and language shift. Clearly, not all families or speakers have the luxury of considering several choices. Minority speakers who do not speak the majority language do not have a choice in the matter, nor do poor and less-educated parents who have few if any resources to help them with native language maintenance. As Piller (2001) correctly points out, a careful weighting of all options may be most common in the case of 'elite bilinguals', middle- and upper-class professionals who speak more than one language and are comfortable transmitting these languages to their children. For other parents, in particular immigrants from lower-middle-class and working-class backgrounds, what is at issue is not bilingualism *per se* but rather minority language maintenance.

Studies conducted to date suggest that parents commonly describe bilingualism as an investment in the children's intellectual development, academic success and wider opportunities in the job market (Döpke, 1992; Piller, 2001). Parents invested in the transmission of the mother tongue underscore the importance of teaching the children their linguistic, cultural and religious heritage, and maintaining cross-generational communication and family ties (Mills, 2004; Okita, 2002; Pease-Alvarez, 2003; Schecter & Bayley, 1997; Tuominen, 1999). Those who decide against or fail to transmit

their native language, talk about the challenges involved in such maintenance in the presence of a powerful majority language (Mills, 2004; Pease-Alvarez, 2003). These parents may also display negative attitudes towards the country of origin and/or its child-rearing traditions (Okita, 2002) and see language shift as a way to break loose of the past and advance socially and economically (Constantinidou, 1994; Gal, 1978; Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1994; McDonald, 1994). It is clear that some of these reasons are linked to speakers' emotional attitudes and investments, yet, until now, the role of emotions in parents' linguistic choices has remained largely in the background.

Local choices, made within specific speech events, are commonly examined in studies of bilingual language socialisation conducted from an interactional sociolinguistic perspective (cf. Döpke, 1992; Lanza, 1997; Zentella, 1997). The findings of these studies show that communicative purposes, linguistic competence and dominance of the interlocutors, interactional setting, community norms and status of the parent's language, are all among factors that impact parental language choice in bilingual families. Since the main goal of these studies is to understand the relationship between parental language strategies and children's linguistic development, only a few have paid attention to the interplay between language and emotions.

In one study of the Puerto-Rican community in the USA, fathers were shown to favour Spanish to reprimand, discipline and scold the children, while mothers gave short commands in English (Hoffman, 1971). In another study, a Puerto-Rican mother in New York City spoke to the children in Spanish when she was angry: her Spanish comments were commands or threats that followed the English versions and served to underscore them (Zentella, 1997: 75). A similar behaviour was observed in German immigrant families in Brazil, where German was used more often for scolding the children, and Portuguese for songs and storytelling (Heye, 1975). In turn, in a Mexican-descent family in Texas, bilingual parents favoured English as an overall language of family communication, with Spanish reserved for endearments, such as *mijita* (my daughter) (Schechter & Bayley, 1997). And in bilingual Aymara–Spanish households in Bolivia, parents drew on both sets of linguistic resources to communicate emotions (Luykx, 2003). Spanish was used by the Aymara parents for tender 'baby talk', characterised by high pitch, childish pronunciation, and the use of affectionate names, such as *wawita* (little baby) or *mamita* (little mother). Aymara was used for scolding, disciplining and commands. In the Aymara household where the researcher had stayed, the mother's commands to her children were almost always in Aymara. Spanish commands were often followed by their Aymara equivalents, or combined a Spanish verb root with the Aymara imperative suffix, e.g. 'Dejamcha!' ('put that down', *deja* (Spanish) + /m/imperative (Aymara) + /cha/sentence suffix (Aymara)).

Together, these studies suggest that bi- and multilingual parents are often engaged in multilingual parenting, with L1 used somewhat more often for disciplining, reprimands and scolding (Heye, 1975; Hoffman, 1971; Luykx, 2003; Zentella, 1997). Specific language use patterns may however be hard to pin down, as L2 may also be used for disciplining and commands (Hoffman, 1971), while affection may be expressed both in L1 (Schechter & Bayley, 1997)

and L2 (Luykx, 2003). Consequently, rather than looking for language choice patterns, I will focus on affective factors that influence language choice, including that for emotional expression.

Why should these factors require a separate investigation, one may ask? Several reasons may justify such an enterprise, but one stands out to me as primary: a linguist's responsibility to parents who are or would like to raise their children bilingually and who are often offered contradictory advice on the issue. Elizabeth Lanza (1997: 75), an American linguist living in Norway and an expert in childhood bilingualism, recalls:

Once I encountered a French woman, married to a Norwegian, who was addressing her 18-month-old child (apparently begrudgingly) in non-native Norwegian. After conferring with her husband, I discovered that at a recent visit to the paediatrician, the parents were given advice that... it was the best for the child to acquire one language first. As this advice came from the mouth of an 'expert', the parents felt they should comply, a situation which especially rendered the mother quite unhappy.

Similar to this mother, other parents may also find themselves in situations where they are using the second language reluctantly and are unable to establish an emotional connection in it. Not surprisingly, bilingual family newsletters, websites and practical guides for parents of bilingual children (cf. Baker, 2000; Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 1999; Harding & Riley, 1986; Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003a) often emphasise the emotional force of the L1, suggesting that communicating with the child in the L1 would ensure a maximally close relationship. Yet many parents are also apprehensive about advice such as 'Mom, speak only your native language; Dad, do the same.' (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003b: 113). The monolingual standards underlying such recommendations belie many parents' experiences of establishing a connection in a second language or through the use of two or more languages. To address future parents' questions and concerns about establishing an emotional connection with their children, the present study will examine bi- and multilingual parents' experiences and perceptions of emotional reality of bilingual family talk.

Emotions in Bilingual Family Talk: Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the role of emotions in language choice and code-switching in bilingual family talk, I will approach the relationship between language and emotions from two distinct perspectives. The first perspective highlights *perceived language emotionality*, i.e. parents' perceptions of emotionality of their respective languages. Previous research suggests that these perceptions are grounded in neurophysiological reality, in particular in autobiographic memory associations and in levels of autonomic positive and negative arousal elicited by a particular language (see also Harris' paper, this issue). Lamendella (1977) and later Paradis (1994) have argued that because the first language is always acquired in a natural environment, through perceptual and affective channels, it becomes integrated into the limbic system, which, among other things, is responsible for emotions, drives, desires

and motivation. In the process of first language socialisation, L1 words and phrases acquire affective connotations and become integrated with emotionally charged memories. Some of these links are positive, while other words become taboos enforced by parents and other socialising agents (Dewaele, this issue). The forbidden words and topics, as well as words and phrases linked to traumatic and emotional experiences, become 'conditioned stimuli for affective arousal' (Bond & Lai, 1986: 180). In contrast, in a language learned in adulthood, even in a natural environment, the speaker may escape strict socialisation common for L1 acquisition and thus experience less arousal in response to L2 words and expressions. As a result, swearing or retelling a painful childhood memory in L2 may be easier because L2 words 'are devoid of associative triggers leading to the emotive soil in which the affective roots of these memories lie' (Aragno & Schlachet, 1996: 25).

Consequently, it is hypothesised that the study participants may have different perceptions of emotionality of their languages, depending on the context of their acquisition and use. They present a particularly interesting group for exploring this issue, because most are raising the children in more than one language, and some in a language different from their own L1. As a result of being parents, as well as being in a relationship with a speaker of another language, and/or living and working in another language, they have undergone – or are still in the process of – intense second language socialisation, where they perform simultaneously as agents (socialising their children) and subjects (being socialised by children and partners). This case allows us to ask: can intense second language socialisation influence perceptions of language emotionality or does L1 forever remain the language of one's emotions?

The second perspective taken in this paper is a discursive one; it shifts the focus from the relationship between languages *and* emotions to languages *of* emotions, i.e. speakers' affective repertoires and emotion discourses. *Affective repertoires* here refer to linguistic means for emotional expression offered by a particular language. Some of these means may overlap in the two or more languages in question, for instance, in the lexical domain of emotion or emotion-laden terms (e.g. love/*amor*). Others may be language-specific: Among these are certain intonational contours, vocalisations, such as the French [bz] that signals irritation, or the Russian [φu:] which signals disgust, morphosyntactic means, such as the Russian or Polish diminutives (for examples, see Wierzbicka, this issue), or language-specific terms, such as the Spanish *cariño* (affect, love, tenderness) or the Japanese *amae* (a feeling of dependence on someone). These differences allow us to inquire whether parental choices are also influenced by linguistic means of affect performance offered by their respective languages.

In turn, *emotion discourses* provide a cultural lens through which emotional expression is located, assessed and interpreted within a network of moral order and power relations in a particular speech community. Some speech communities may put more value on direct emotional expression, while others prefer the indirect means, framing direct expression as inappropriate. Take for instance the US democratic primary election of 2004. Before the primaries began, former governor of Vermont Howard Dean had emerged as the number

one contender in the polls. Yet his 'shrill' election-night speech in Iowa, which ended with a high-pitch frat-boy scream, raised concerns about his temperament and judgment, and ultimately cost him the election. The sound bites from the speech were replayed time and again in the media, yet no commentary was ever offered as to why the speech was considered inappropriate. Rather, the journalists assumed that they and their audience share a common cultural framework – one that places negative value on excessive emotionality in political speeches. While it is not hard to think of other times and places where shrill speeches from political leaders were the norm rather than the exception, in a culture that favours 'cool' and reserved behaviour (Stearns, 1994), high pitch and shrill voice coming from a middle-aged man vying for the highest office in the country became markers of an unstable emotional state, undesirable for a potential president.

Emotion discourses may also serve to construct particular languages as more or less emotional, either in terms of chronology (e.g. mother tongue versus languages learned later in life) or typology (Italian and Spanish constructed as warm and affectionate and German and Dutch as cold and harsh). A consideration of emotion discourses which frame certain behaviours as legitimate and desirable and others as strange and inappropriate, allows us to ask whether parental language choices are also influenced by ways in which emotionality is valued and expressed in their speech communities.

Research Design and Questions

The present study analyses data collected through an on-line 'Bilingualism and emotions' webquestionnaire which contained 34 questions (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001). The questionnaire was advertised through several listservs and informal contacts with colleagues around the world. A total of 1039 multilinguals contributed to the database (731 females, 308 males). The following sociobiographical information was collected from the participants: gender, age, education level, ethnic group, occupation, languages known, dominant language(s), chronological order of language acquisition, context of acquisition, age of onset, frequency of use, typical interlocutors, and self-rated proficiency scores for speaking, comprehending, reading and writing in the languages in question. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of closed questions with five-point Likert scales, the second consisted of open-ended questions where the participants had to write a response. Language choice was determined for self- and other-directed speech, for emotional and nonemotional speech.

Two types of answers are analysed in the study. The first type involves answers to closed questions about the frequency with which the participants use their languages with the children in general, and in particular to discipline and praise them (rated on the Likert scale from 'never' (1) to 'all the time' (5)). As the questionnaire did not exclusively target parents, these questions were answered by 389 participants only. Their responses are analysed quantitatively.

The second type involves answers to five open-ended questions which asked about: (1) the weight of the phrase 'I love you' in their respective

languages; (2) their linguistic preferences for emotion terms and terms of endearment; (3) emotional significance of their languages; (4) language of the home and language in which they argue in; and (5) ease or difficulty of discussing emotional topics in languages other than the first. Notably, none of these questions involved parent–child communication *per se* and did not require the participants to comment on it. Hence, I analyse responses from 141 participants who addressed this issue spontaneously. These answers are analysed through a combination of thematic analysis and discourse analysis, with the focus on lexical choices made by the respondents to rationalise their linguistic preferences.

Among the 141 participants, there were 101 women (72%) and 40 men (28%); these numbers mirror the gender distribution in the larger sample of 389 and in the overall database. The ages of the respondents ranged between 28 and 67 years of age. All respondents were college-educated: BA, 35 (25%); MA, 43 (30%); PhD, 63 (45%). These characteristics also mirror the distribution in the larger sample and in the database (see also Dewaele, this issue). Clearly, these respondents are not representative of the more general bi- and multilingual population – the overwhelming majority are well educated ‘elite bilinguals’, people who have time and resources to invest in searching for information about and reflecting upon issues in bilingual child-rearing. The overrepresentation of well educated professionals is easily explained by the advertising procedure (our informal contacts were other PhDs who in turn knew other language professionals; similarly the listservs we advertised on were most likely to be read by well educated parents who knew how to find these resources). In addition, the fact that this was a webquestionnaire limited the population to participants with easy access to the internet. The dominance of female respondents is perhaps best explained by the topic itself, as it is quite possible that as a group women may be more comfortable discussing emotions, parenting and relationships. This overrepresentation of women and PhDs undoubtedly skews the sample and suggests the need for better balance in the future. At the same time, it does not devalue the findings of the study, as, regardless of their education level and material resources, all bi- and multilingual mothers and fathers deal with some of the same issues, struggling to maintain an emotional connection with their children across cultural, linguistic and generational boundaries.

In terms of the number of languages spoken by each individual, the sample consists of 17 bilinguals (12%), 35 trilinguals (25%), 34 speakers of four languages (24%) and 55 speakers of five or more languages (39%). Twenty-five L1s are represented in the sample, with the number of speakers of each language as the L1 as follows: English = 58; French = 17; German = 14; Spanish = 13; Dutch = 7; Finnish = 6; Italian = 6; Swedish = 5; Russian = 4; Hungarian = 3; Portuguese = 3; Slovene = 3; Romanian = 3; Welsh = 3; Serbo-Croatian = 2; Bengali = 1; Chinese = 1; Danish = 1; Greek = 1; Hebrew = 1; Japanese = 1; Oriya = 1; Polish = 1; Sindhi = 1 and Slovak = 1 (with 16 people bilingual from birth).

Altogether, the multilinguals in the sample spoke 47 languages: Arabic, ASL, Basque, Bengali, Bosnian, Breton, Burmese, Catalan, Cantonese, Danish, Duri, Dutch, English, Farsi, Finnish, French, German (including Swiss German

and High German), Greek, Hebrew, Hindhi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Latvian, Malay, Mandarin, Navajo, Norwegian, Nugunu, Oriya, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Sindhi, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and Welsh.

Two research questions are asked in the data analysis:

- (1) What emotion-related factors influence parental language choice in bi- and multilingual families?
- (2) Do perceptions of language emotionality change in the process of language socialisation?

Results

Factors affecting parental language choice

Quantitative analyses of responses from 389 participants identify language dominance as the key factor affecting language choices, overall and in emotional expression. A one-way ANOVA with language dominance as independent variable (three groups: L1 dominant, L1+LX dominant, LX dominant, with LX referring to any language that is not L1) and child-directed language use in L1 as dependent variable showed a highly significant effect of language dominance ($F(2, 389) = 69.6, p < 0.0001, \eta^2 = 0.261$) on language choice. This means that if parents are dominant in the L1, they are most likely to use the L1 in communication with the children, but if they are dominant in LX or in two or more languages, they are less likely to use the L1. This pattern is evident in Table 1, which summarises language choices for 141 respondents, dividing them into three subgroups based on language dominance. We can see that in each subgroup the highest number of respondents opted to use the language(s) in which they were dominant. Among the 141 respondents, only one parent chose to use LX while dominant in L1, and there are no

Table 1 Respondents' language dominance and language choices

<i>Language dominance</i>	<i>Language used in the family</i>	<i>Parents in the sample</i>
L1	L1	37 respondents (26%)
	LX	1 respondent (0.7%)
	L1 + LX	25 respondents (18%)
LX	L1	
	LX	10 respondents (7%)
	L1 + LX	4 respondents (3%)
L1 + LX	L1	23 respondents (16%)
	LX	11 respondents (8%)
	L1 + LX	30 respondents (21.3%)

respondents who see themselves as dominant in LX and use exclusively L1 with the children.

A MANOVA revealed that there was also a significant and strong L1 dominance effect for praise and disciplining (Wilks $\lambda = 0.71$, $F(2, 251) = 22.7$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.154$), suggesting that language dominance strongly impacts language choice for emotion speech acts as well. An analysis of the between-subjects effects suggests that the effect is highly significant both for praise ($F(2, 251) = 46.63$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.271$) and for disciplining ($F(2, 251) = 37.06$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.228$). According to Cohen's (1992) criteria for assessing the predictive power of a set of independent variables, the η^2 value for disciplining indicates a medium effect size, while the higher η^2 value for praising indicates a large effect size. This means that parents dominant in L1 and LX, or in LX, are somewhat more likely to use the L1 for disciplining their children and LX for praising them (see Figure 1).

How did perceived language emotionality contribute to their linguistic choices? The average value of perceived emotionality of the L1 is 4.31, compared to 2.82 for the L2, 1.98 for the L3 and 1.61 for the L4, which suggests that L1 is much more emotional for the participants than their other languages. Statistically there appears to be no relationship in L1 between language emotionality and language choice ($F(4, 382) = 0.047$, $p = \text{ns}$, $\eta^2 = 0.005$). Rather, the choice of L1 appears to be strongly governed by dominance and there is no statistical relationship in L1 between dominance and perceived emotionality ($F(2, 384) = 0.86$, $p = \text{ns}$, $\eta^2 = 0.004$), as even LX-dominant parents continue to perceive their L1 as highly emotional. An ANOVA revealed, however, a weak effect of perceived emotionality of the L2 on the overall choice of that language ($F(4, 351) = 2.00$, $p = 0.094$, $\eta^2 = 0.022$) (see Figure 2), which means that the parents are more likely to select this language if they perceive it as more emotional.

A MANOVA showed a significant effect of perceived emotionality on the choice of the L2 for disciplining and praising (Wilks $\lambda = 0.89$, $F(2, 213) = 3.22$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.057$) (see Figure 2). An analysis of the between-subjects effects

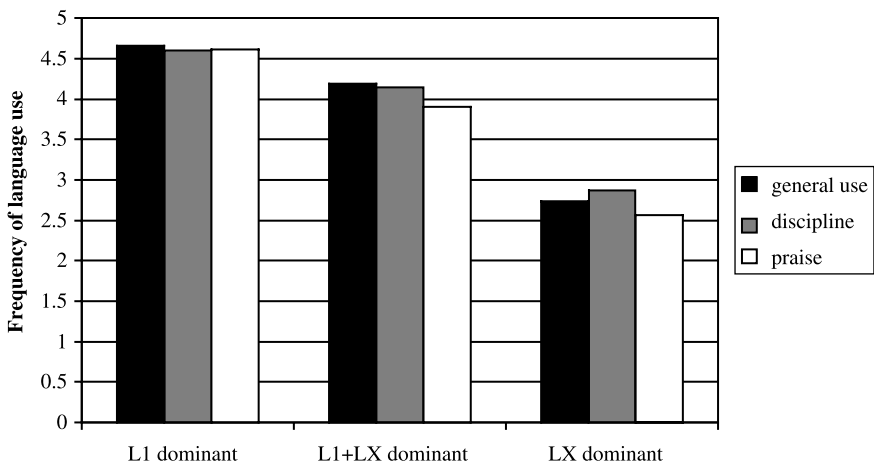


Figure 1 Influence of language dominance on parental language choice

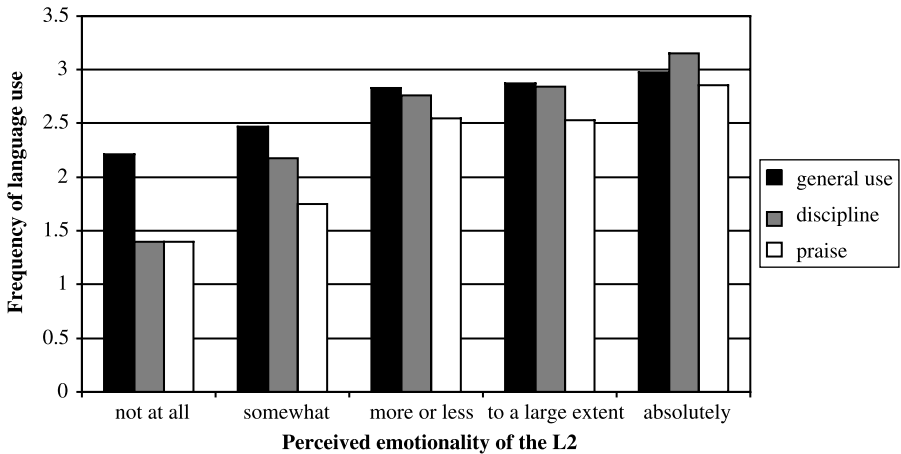


Figure 2 Influence of perceived language emotionality on parental language choice

suggests that the effect is highly significant for disciplining ($F(4, 214) = 6.15$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.103$) and significant for praising ($F(4, 214) = 4.53$, $p < 0.002$, $\eta^2 = 0.078$). However the effect sizes are small. In contrast, in L3 and L4, a MANOVA showed no overall effect of perceived emotionality on language choice for praising and disciplining (L3: Wilks $\lambda = 0.96$, $F(2, 149) = 0.67$, $p = \text{ns}$, $\eta^2 = 0.018$; L4: Wilks $\lambda = 0.90$, $F(2, 102) = 1.37$, $p = \text{ns}$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$). A marginally significant between-subjects effect emerged however in the L4 for disciplining ($F(4, 102) = 2.42$, $p = 0.053$, $\eta^2 = 0.086$) (the L5 group was too small to carry out a reliable statistical analysis). These results suggest that perceived language emotionality particularly affects the choice of L2 for emotional speech acts, such as praising and disciplining. General language use seems less influenced by the perceived emotionality of the L2. The absence of significant relations in the L3 and L4 (despite similar trends) is probably linked to the lower average values of perceived emotionality in these languages (which limits the size of possible individual differences) and their extremely low frequency of use. The average use of the L1 with children is 4.3, compared with 2.8 for the L2, 1.9 for the L3 and 1.5 for the L4. These values are so low that their link with the independent variables can at best be tenuous.

Overall then, according to the quantitative analysis, perceived language emotionality does not play a very significant role in overall language choice for family communication – this choice is mostly affected by language dominance. In other words, parents dominant in LX may still see their L1 as highly emotional yet prefer the LX to communicate with their children. On the other hand, perceived language emotionality does play a role in choosing L2 overall and in particular for praising and disciplining. This means that parents are more likely to choose a language learned later in life if they see it as more emotional. Needless to say, these results do not point to a cause-and-effect relationship because higher perceived emotionality may in fact be an outcome of more frequent language use and also because language dominance or emotionality are not objective phenomena existing independently of human agency and social context. Rather, they are corollaries of complex linguistic

trajectories of individuals who make choices about what language to use, when and with whom. To understand how these choices are made, we will have to go beyond statistical trends towards participants' own words.

Parenting in L1

The qualitative analysis of the data suggests that the statistics may not be telling the whole story and that perceived language emotionality is an important factor for many parents, both in overall language choices and in choices made for particular emotion speech acts. As far as the overall choice is concerned, perceived emotionality of L1 appears to strengthen the conviction of parents who reproduce their own language socialisation experiences:

(1) French (L1) it is the language in which I best feel/perceive (and use) the connotations carried by emotion terms. Plus when speaking to my son I think they are part of a mother–child affective pattern I reproduce because I experienced it as sweet and wants to transmit it in the same language my mother uses with me. (Pauline, 31, French–Dutch–English, dominant in L1 French, uses L1 French – here and further on references to language use imply language use with children, A.P. All quotes are reproduced with original spelling, A.P.)

Note that Pauline begins by justifying her choice as a rational one through her superior linguistic competence in connotations of L1 emotion terms. Although she adds that she would like to recreate her own 'sweet' childhood experience with her child, she couches this desire in technical terms borrowed from linguistics and psychology, such as 'reproduction of a mother–child affective pattern'. In doing so, she exhibits a concern with presenting a rational, rather than a purely emotional, persona in her response. We will see later that this concern is shared by several other respondents.

At the same time, Pauline is explicit about affective reasons which shaped her language choice with her son. In contrast, the majority of L1-dominant respondents who are raising their children in the L1, take L1 emotionality for granted and rarely comment on it. This issue mostly comes to the foreground for respondents who attempt, at least initially, to use the LX, the language of their partner and/or environment. For Ioanna and Anne Marie below, this private language planning has failed as the two women found themselves unable to interact with their children in a language that wasn't the language of their own childhood and did not have appropriate affective connotations:

(2) I guess my preference is L1 again – in English it just doesn't feel right somehow. When my daughter was born I was planning to start talking English to her as soon as possible (to comfort her when she cried etc.) but found out I couldn't – I either didn't know the words or they didn't feel good enough to express what I felt. (Ioanna, 37, Polish–English–Russian, dominant in L1 Polish and L2 English, uses L1 Polish with the child in the L2 environment)

I have a preference for French. When my children were born I wanted to use English just so that they would be accustomed to it from an early age

but I just couldn't. It sounded untrue. (Anne Marie, 36, French–Dutch–English, dominant in L1 French and L3 English, uses L1 French with the children in the L1 environment)

To clarify their perceptions of LX words sounding hollow, the two mothers appeal to the notions of right and wrong ('it just doesn't feel right somehow'), true and untrue ('it sounded untrue') or good and bad ('they [the words] didn't feel good enough to express what I felt'). These experiences contradict the advice frequently given to bilingual parents to decide who is going to speak which language to the child 'before the child is born because for many people it is extremely difficult to change the language you speak to a person once you established a relationship in one language' (Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 1999: 18). 'Establishing a relationship' with a newborn in LX did not prove feasible for either woman, both had to reconsider their original linguistic choices. Their comments suggest that while in the majority of the cases issues other than emotionality determine parental language choice, emotionality (or rather lack of it) may lead a parent to reject a particular language, at least for a while, or to feel unhappy about using LX and appeal to L1 for emotional expression, including baby talk. Susan Fries (1998: 133), an American woman living in France and married to a Frenchman, remembers how surprised she was when her husband decided to adopt English as the family language:

Despite my fluency in French, had we been living in the US I would never have spoken French to my children initially. Since I feel closer to my emotions in English, to this day I feel awkward cooing to babies in a language other than English.

Other respondents concur, pointing out that trying to create an emotional connection in a second language feels 'fake' and 'unnatural', as if one were 'acting':

(3) Welsh is the language which is the one that feels natural for expressing feelings. Expressing endearment in English has a false 'acting' ring to it. I would inevitably talk to babies and animals in Welsh. (Maureen, 47, Welsh–English, uses L1 Welsh)

Expressing strong emotions in a language other than my mother tongue French seems artificial. (Stephanie, 50, French–Dutch–English–German, uses L1 French)

Some participants who reverted back to the L1 after having lived in the LX for a while, comment on the 'healing' properties of this shift, saying that parenthood allowed them to 'reconnect' with the language of their childhood and feel more 'whole':

(4) ...since I started talking German at home with my children again I guess I'm a linguistically more integrated person again. (Ingrid, 32, German–English–French–Swedish, uses L1 German and L4 Swedish)

English is MY language – I’ve reconnected with the language and being English since I’ve had children. (Laura, 36, English–Catalan–Spanish, uses L1 English in the L2/L3 environment)

These and similar responses suggest that perceived language emotionality, in particular emotionality of the L1, may affect the overall language choice in parent–child communication. It appears a particularly important factor in the use of terms of endearment. Several respondents made links between their childhood experiences and language choice for the terms of endearment, suggesting that discursive histories imbue L1 words with memories and affect and make them a more meaningful choice even when the L2 is otherwise the language of the family:

(5) English comes more spontaneous. I use the same words for my children that my parents used with me. (Mary Ellen, 41, English–Italian, uses both languages)

I probably tend to think of parent-to-child or grandparent-to-child terms of endearment primarily in German since those are the terms I heard from my parents and grandparents. Some English words for emotions are a bit ugly – ‘infatuation’ for example. So are some German ones come to think of it. (Konrad, 43, German–English–French, dominant in L2 English, uses mostly L2 English)

Some participants go even further and state, like Susan Fries (1998) above, that they are unable to use the terms of endearment in LX, precisely because these terms are not permeated with interactional history, meaning and affect. In the words of one bilingual mother, to use LX endearment terms would be almost like offering the children ‘emotions of a different person’:

(6) My children get all the ‘Schatzlein’ and ‘Spaetzchen’ ‘Liebchen’ and whatever from me. But to use English terms of endearment seems almost wrong to me as if I was doing something forbidden. I am not an English mother and if I were to say ‘darling’ a lot I would give them the emotions of a different person. In my mothering I definitely feel German. (Bertha, 38, German–English, uses mostly L1 German)

I know how to express the deepest and the most subtle feelings in my mother tongue English because most of my present loved ones are English speakers and because the terms are freighted with lots of childhood and later history for me. The words ‘sweetheart’ ‘honey’ etc. come very easily while I have never been able to use standard terms of endearment such as ‘aelskling’ (darling) or ‘soetnos’ (honey-bun) in Swedish even with lovers. (Edith, 44, English–German–Swedish, uses L1 English)

What is particularly intriguing about the comments made by Bertha, Edith and earlier Konrad, is the perception of LX terms as false, ‘forbidden’ or ‘ugly’. These perceptions are echoed in other responses which contrast the ‘meaningful’, ‘sincere’ and ‘natural’ L1 endearment terms with ‘silly’ and ‘false’ LX terms, used to convey irony or distance:

(7) I have a preference for L1 [Russian] terms because they seem more sincere and natural. Terms from L2 [English] seem to be a little bit silly sometimes sound false. For example 'honey' or 'pumpkin' or 'honey bun' etc. I just translate them into Russian and then they are just funny. When I want to say something lovingly to my family I definitely use Russian terms. I can use English terms ironically or just jokingly. (Natasha, 31, Russian–English, lives in the USA, husband is a speaker of L1 but children favour L2)

I guess Spanish is more intimate whenever I want my children to understand or behave in certain way specially true when I want to express tenderness. (Alejandro, 32, Spanish–English–French, dominant in L1 Spanish, uses Spanish, English and French with children who go to an American school in a Spanish-speaking country)

All in all, we can see that the perception of the superior emotionality of L1 may influence both the overall choice of language (seen in cases in which LX was chosen initially) and the choice of language for terms of endearment. We also see that speakers of different languages, unfamiliar with each other, are surprisingly alike in the way they word their responses. The choice of L1 is presented as 'sincere', 'intimate', 'spontaneous', 'right' and 'natural', while the choice of LX, at least as far as the terms of endearment go, is constructed as 'forbidden', 'false', 'artificial', 'untrue', 'silly', 'funny' and 'wrong'. This consistency of lexical choices reflects a common experience of many bilinguals for whom the translation equivalents of their emotion-laden words are not 'equal'. The L1 terms of endearment, linked to autobiographic memories, appear to elicit higher levels of positive arousal and mental imagery, perceived by the speakers as the feelings of tenderness, intimacy, sincerity, spontaneity and 'wholesomeness.' In contrast, LX terms, at least those without a discursive history, appear to elicit lower levels of positive arousal and few if any associations, hence the feelings of dissonance and artificiality. Consequently, L1 words, grounded in emotional autobiographic experience, are viewed as 'real' and LX ones as 'play' words which do not invoke the same intense feelings (Pavlenko, forthcoming). These perceptions explain why the French woman encountered by Lanza (1997) felt reluctant to use Norwegian with her 18-month-old child.

At the same time, a closer analysis of the respondents' backgrounds suggests that this perception may not necessarily be common to all bi- and multilinguals. All of the respondents who commented on L1 emotionality are speakers of standard varieties of Western languages: French, German, English, Polish, Welsh, Russian and Spanish. It is quite possible that what we see here is not a phenomenon that exists across the board but rather a reflection of romantic ideology of first language primacy, associated with European languages. It is not clear whether speakers of non-Western languages, or those who grew up speaking a dialect rather than a standard variety feel (or rather are 'taught to feel' the same way). The ideology of first language primacy is inextricably linked with another romantic Western ideology, that of the mother–child relationship characterised by a strong emotional attachment and special intimacy. Scholarship on language socialisation across cultures

shows that the insistence on emotional communicative bond with infant children, created through baby talk, may also be a uniquely Western phenomenon (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

The romantic discourse of first language primacy naturalises the L1 as the ‘right choice’, the only reasonable language to use with one’s child, at least in emotional communication, and allows parents to legitimise their insistence on using the L1. At the same time, this discourse may be used to tie speakers to particular languages against their will and to penalise them for making new allegiances. The negative impact of this discourse is particularly visible in the cases of minority women, who refuse to transmit their native Breton, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh or Sami, and are positioned as ‘language killers’, blamed for the language demise (Romaine, 1999: 180). Let us examine now what happens when parents choose to use LX, overall and for emotional expression – does this experience make them feel detached, ‘fake’, and ‘artificial’?

Parenting in LX

A closer look at the data reveals that the LX is not necessarily perceived as the language of detachment by respondents who are married to LX speakers and/or are bringing up children in that language. As seen in responses below, daily communication in LX, with one’s partner and/or children, led many participants to forge emotional links to their new language:

(8) Hebrew [is my favorite language for emotional expression] because it is the one I use most with my children and husband. (Camille, 40, French–English–Dutch–Hebrew–Italian, dominant in L1 French, uses L4 Hebrew with the children)

L4 [Polish] is my second family language it is one of the three languages of my children my partner’s native language it is of exclusively personal or emotional significance for me (i.e. not very useful outside that context). (Liliane, 34, German–English–French–Polish–Dutch)

I spoke mostly Spanish to my husband until we had children. Then we spoke English when the children were present because we wanted them to learn English and we were in a Spanish-speaking country... [Nowadays], with my daughters I speak mostly English because that is what I have always spoken with them. But I might switch to Spanish if I am really emotional. (Francis, 56, English–Spanish–French–Portuguese)

Here, Francis, a native speaker of English, who spoke English to her daughters most of her life, sees herself switching to her L2 Spanish in emotional situations. And for Liliane and Camille it is their L4, which also happens to be the language of their partners, that became the favourite language of emotional expression and a language of utmost emotional significance.

The socialisation process affects not only the overall language use but also the use of particular emotion speech acts and terms, including the terms of

endearment, which some prefer to coo and whisper in LX, sometimes regardless of their overall competence in the language:

(9) I tend to use Italian endearments to my husband and children because it relates more to the reality of my every day life. (Patricia, 49, English–Italian, uses L2 Italian and some L1 English with her children, lives in Italy)

Even though we speak mostly English at home, [I prefer] the words (terms of endearment) for which my husband only uses Farsi and he uses them a lot with me and our 4-year old son. So those are the words I use and prefer as well. He also says them with such emotion and we have been living together for ten years so I got very use to the words they are my words too. (Aida, 33, Spanish–English–French–Farsi, uses predominantly L2 English)

It appears that a prolonged and intense interactional history of LX communication, which engages the speaker's emotions and thus the limbic system, results in a shift in the bilingual mental lexicon, whereby LX lexical items acquire affective connotations, imagery and episodic associations, and thus become 'their' words. Some are very conscious of this unique aspect of second language socialisation in adulthood, which Shelley names 'emotional internalisation':

(10) I am very aware of the emotional internalisation process that happened as I became more proficient. The language moved inside me and the more it did the more I got the connotations of my vocabulary and the easier retrieval became for speech. It became more vivid internally. (Shelley, 47, English–French, uses L1 English with some L2 French)

A similar feeling is expressed by an Afrikaans-speaking woman married to an English speaker in de Klerk's (2001: 207) study of linguistic intermarriage in South Africa:

I always had hoped that maybe we could stay a two language family, that I could keep alive my [Afrikaans] side. There was a point where I felt guilty that I wasn't doing it, and then it's not so much that I gave up, but I stopped feeling guilty. That was the point at which I started developing an English language of the heart, and was able to use English endearments with the children.

For some participants, the secondary socialisation and resulting shift in language dominance are also accompanied by L1 attrition, including in the domain of emotional expression:

(11) I cannot understand why I have lost the ability to express most of feelings in French but it has happened. Somehow it seems easier [in English]; doing it in French requires more effort, concentration and involvement. (Helene, 32, French–English–German, L1 French, dominant in L2 English)

Importantly, however, Helene has lost the ease of expression, not necessarily the perception of her L1 French as highly emotional. Dewaele's (2004) analysis of the webquestionnaire responses from self-reported L1 attriters suggests that perceived L1 attrition had no effect on the perceived emotionality of the L1. Rather, what we see is that in the process of second language socialisation these respondents have shifted the perception of emotionality of their LX and have formed multiple emotional connections. It is not surprising then that while some participants have a favourite language of emotional expression, be it L1 or LX, others are comfortable expressing their emotions in two or more languages:

(12) with my parents and children English seems to be deeper emotionally while with my partner Hebrew seems more emotional. Until our children were born we spoke only Hebrew. (Elana, 29, English–Hebrew, born in the US, lives in Israel, uses L1 English)

My second and third language [Dutch and English] have become my dominant languages. therefore it is natural to use them for emotional topics. (Christine, 36, French–Dutch–English–Spanish, married to a speaker of Dutch, uses L2 Dutch and L3 English)

English is the first language that comes to mind with my immediate family so that is my preference but I share love with dear friends whose first language is Spanish so that must be ranked a close second. As an example when my daughter was in Spain or Puerto Rico and I was home in the U.S. we usually used Spanish over the phone to express our love and now that she's nearby in Connecticut we're back to English most of the time. With my sons or parents I automatically use English but with my Spanish-speaking friends or bilingual daughter Spanish is usually easier or we may jump back and forth. (Laura, 51, English–Spanish, uses L1 English and L2 Spanish)

We can see that for Elana, emotionality and language choice depend on the interlocutor – her L1 English works better with her parents and children, while her L2 Hebrew seems more emotional with her husband, who was the primary agent of her second language socialisation. In turn, for Laura language choice for emotional expression depends on the context and the interlocutors – Spanish is chosen to talk to bilingual friends and daughter, in particular when the daughter calls home from Spain or Puerto Rico. And Christine favours two languages learned later in life, rather than her native Dutch.

The comments presented in this section highlight two important findings: (1) second language socialisation may affect both perceived language emotionality and language preference for emotional expression; and (2) as a result, many bi- and multilinguals are comfortable expressing their emotions in more than one language. In other words, while bilingual parents prefer to perform affect in the language most meaningful and emotional to them, this language is not always the L1; LX may also function as the language of their emotions.

Since the respondents are predominantly women, the discussion above may have created an impression that secondary socialisation is a gendered phenomenon. Yet this is not the case at all. Fathers may also be socialised into language by their partners and children and adopt new languages of emotional expression. Take, for instance, the case of George, L1 speaker of English, who adopted L3 Czech as the language of reprimands, because it was most effective, bound to elicit the most visceral response in the children, used to Czech reprimands from the mother:

(13) We spoke English at home; I spoke English to the children and my wife spoke Czech. This is why I still often scold them in Czech as I picked it up from my wife (and when they have to respond in a hurry they still often react more quickly to a Czech command!). (George, 40, English–German–Czech, uses predominantly L1 English with some L3 Czech)

In fact, some fathers – or for that matter, mothers – may appeal to the new language to reinvent themselves and to create a new ‘parenting personality’, especially if they are not eager to reproduce their own childhood experiences. Susan Fries (1998), the American woman married to a Frenchman, thus explained his decision to speak to their children in English:

I believe that using English with his children enabled him to reinvent his role as a father. His own father had never taken part in day-to-day childcare, so there was no model to follow. In adopting English, my husband also adopted certain expressions that he heard me using in my mothering. As the children got older, however, he began using French more often, especially for intellectual discussions, when he felt he lacked the precise vocabulary in English. (p. 133)

Fries’ comments – just like the responses above – highlight the fact that many bi- and multilingual parents use more than one language to create an emotional connection to their children. Let us examine then whether they go about it randomly, or whether there are certain factors that inform their linguistic preferences in emotional expression.

Multilingual parenting

The discussion above complicates the role of emotions in bilingual family talk in three ways. First of all, it suggests that the view of L1 as the language of emotions and the LX as the language of detachment oversimplifies the complex reality of bi- or multilingual existence, where second language socialisation in adulthood may change perceived language emotionality, language dominance and preferred language of emotional expression. Secondly, it points to the dissociation between perceived language emotionality and the preferred language of emotional expression. While for many speakers the most emotional language is also the language they prefer to express their feelings in, this is not necessarily the case for everyone. Some, like Helene (11), may still perceive their L1 as emotional, but no longer be at ease at expressing their feelings in that language. Others may favour the

language of detachment precisely because it allows them to be in control of the situation. And yet others may express their emotions in more than one language, sometimes even within the same sentence.

This means in turn that perceived language emotionality is not the only emotion-related factor that influences language choice in emotional expression. A thematic analysis of participants' responses suggests that their linguistic decision-making is equally influenced by the interlocutors' interactional histories with each other, their linguistic competence in performance of affect in the language in question, and by cross-linguistic differences in affective repertoires and emotion discourses. For instance, for Kumiko, a native speaker of Japanese, it is easier to express emotions in her L2 English. English offers her numerous linguistic resources with which she can express emotions directly, while in Japan emotions are commonly expressed in subtle and indirect ways, often nonverbally:

(14) It is easier for me to express things emotionally in English since culturally open expression is condoned. In Japanese culture people are less open with their feelings and expression is not as open. You learn to read subtle signs and signals which may not be verbal. For example it is easier to scold someone in English because the expressions are more direct. In Japanese scolding may be done through distance-creating acts rather than verbal scolding. (Kumiko, 40, Japanese–English, uses both L1 and L2)

Like Kumiko, some L2 users embrace the possibilities offered by affective repertoires of the new language. Taciturn Americans, for instance, may welcome the Japanese ways, while some Japanese speakers may be attracted to English in part because it offers them new means of emotional self-expression. In the case of such differences, affective repertoires may become a deciding factor not only in language choice for particular speech acts but in fact in the speaker's whole linguistic trajectory:

(15) What attracted me to England as a young girl was the fact that people said 'I love you' with more ease. There wasn't such a big thing about love. Love was more accessible. People 'sent their love' on the phone, signed letters with 'Love', sent each other huge Valentine cards. In Germany 'Liebe' was a much more serious business. . . I don't say 'Ich liebe dich' to my children only 'Ich hab dich lieb' but I happily embrace the opportunity given to me by the English language to say 'I love you' to them. (Bertha, 38, German–English, uses mostly L1 German)

Interestingly, Bertha is not the only one who uses L2 to express her love for her children:

Finnish emotions are rarely stated explicitly. Therefore it is easier to tell my children e.g. that I love them in English. . . I rarely tell my children that I love them in Finnish (L1); it is easier in L2. (Marita, 45, Finnish–English–Swedish, lives in the USA, uses L1 Finnish and L2 English with the children)

I say ['I love you'] to my children all the time and never in Dutch whereas they are raised both in Dutch (my mother tongue) and English (my husband's). I usually speak Dutch to them but I love you is always said in English. In Dutch it just sounds so unnatural. . . By filling out your questionnaire I became aware of the fact that I use my native language for routine but when it comes to expressing my feelings I always do that in English. I speak Dutch to my kids but when it comes to punishing or behaviour or emotions I invariably use English and have the impression it works better. Very strange feeling. (Rita, 31, Dutch–French–English)

What we see here is that some parents who move from speech communities where direct emotional expression is frowned upon to ones where such expression is not only condoned but encouraged, adopt the values of their new community and with them, the affective repertoires that allow them to express their love for the children in an uninhibited fashion. The examples in (15) and (16) also illustrate another trend visible in the data – the tendency to single out English as the language that makes saying 'I love you' possible on the daily basis. Simultaneously, other respondents, many of them native speakers of English, complain about its paucity of terms of endearment as compared to other languages (see also Wierzbicka, this issue):

(17) [I] tend to use L2 and L3 terms of endearment to children – just seems to express what you fell better. no equivalent in English. (Silvia, 36, English–Malay–Tamil, uses mostly L1 English with some L2 and L3)

Whilst I use the English terms with my own children they are also very 'worn out'. I have had my children in Norway and the 'new terms' I have learnt and heard my husband use have a 'novelty' which is special and has emotional connections. In Norway many of the endearment terms and emotional terms are more 'appropriate' for use with children – they say what they mean – 'little friend' and 'my girl/boy' instead of 'dear', 'treasure', 'darling' and other callnames in English. (Sophia, 32, English–Norwegian, uses L1 English and L2 Norwegian)

[I prefer terms of endearment in] Spanish, because there are more ways to refer to my son in Spanish endearingly. (Natalia, 28, English–Spanish–French, uses predominantly L1 English)

It is quite possible that what we see is not necessarily a preference for a particular language, but rather a preference for creative possibilities offered by the use of languages other than the first where the terms of endearment acquire 'sparkle' and 'novelty' (see also Kinginger, this issue). At the same time, it appears that in some domains, certain languages offer more resources than others. Thus, while English emerges as a favourite language of the daily 'I love you's, the rich morphosyntactic system makes Spanish a favourite for terms of endearment (see responses from Francis (8), Laura (12) and Natalia (16)). In turn, Brenda, who is dominant in L1 English and lives in France, coos in a creative mix of French and Spanish:

(18) I use Spanish terms of endearment with my daughters but I Frenchify them like 'mamita' which becomes 'maminette'. French

because I live in France. There is only one term of endearment I use in English and that's 'honey' but this is mostly phatic and unfelt as in 'What is it honey?' 'Listen Hon. . . ' and actually if I am speaking English I'll say 'Honey Baby' but 'mon bébé' 'mon amour' and made-up words (on French sound patterns) are more frequent. (Brenda, 44, English–Spanish–Portuguese–French, dominant in L1 English, uses L1 English and L4 French)

Thus, it appears that affective resources offered by different languages enable bi- and multilingual parents to make different linguistic choices for distinct emotion speech acts, and to exercise their creativity making up new terms at linguistic crossroads. In my own case, I use Russian to shower my son with elaborate diminutives, since even his name, a paltry Nik or Nikita in English, can be transformed in Russian into a dazzling array of Nikitochka, Nikochka, Nikushechka, Nikitushechka and so on. I also marvel at his *ushki* (dear-little-ears), *ruchki* (dear-little-hands), and *nosik* (dear-little-nose). At the same time, I tell him that I love him much more often in English than in Russian, simply because in Russian the direct statement *Ja tebia lubliu* / 'I love you' is associated with the discourse of romantic love and is not commonly used in parent–child communication. Furthermore, I do not always maintain strict linguistic boundaries, allowing our two languages to merge whereby the tender *ushki* and *ruchki* become even more affectionate and humorous 'little *ushkis*' and *ruchkis*.

In short, it appears that in expressing positive affect bilingual parents may appeal to more than one language, depending on linguistic options offered by the languages, as well as their own creativity. But what about negative affect? How much do we think about cross-linguistic options when we fly off the handle? The earlier research (Heye, 1979; Hoffman, 1971; Luykx, 2003; Zentella, 1997), as well as quantitative analyses performed in the present study, suggested that, regardless of language dominance, many bi- and multilingual parents prefer to perform authority, and thus scold and discipline, in their native language. This finding is not surprising as this is the language in which they have the best command of multiple linguistic repertoires and do not have to stop to think about word choices (thus losing face at a crucial moment in the interaction):

(18) Italian is a language that I talk with my husband and his family so there I'm speaking as a wife. I talk German to my children with more authority and I am probably also more a authority speaking in German with them. (Monika, 35, German–Italian–English, uses L1 German)

As started above I know I have a limited vocabulary within emotional topics. I realise by doing this questionnaire that I have never 'learnt' these words at a course or by reading a textbook and neither have I read books about emotional issues/psychology/pop psychology etc. I do read the Norwegian subtitles when watching English films and TV programmes on TV so I believe I UNDERSTAND what others say about emotions perfectly but I very rarely can express emotions in Norwegian as I would in English. I can remember several times when I know I have

used the wrong expression – especially regarding cultural differences. For example I have said ‘angry’ in Norwegian where I was really only ‘irritated’. I know the word for irritated in Norwegian but when emotional I feel limited in my vocabulary and concepts. This is rather difficult since as stated above Norwegians especially with children are a lot less ‘angry’ and more ‘calm’ than I believe Australians and other English speakers to be. (Sophia, 32, English–Norwegian, uses L1 English and L2 Norwegian)

In fact, as Katherine, below, points out tongue-in-cheek, the lack of familiarity with LX linguistic means of performing anger may make one appear a ‘nicer mum’, at least for a while:

(18) The first time I started speaking Danish to my children it felt strange as if I was acting out somebody else’s role. I was a nicer mum then too as I lacked the vocabulary to tell them off properly. Unfortunately time has taught me the necessary words... (Katherine, 32, German–English–Danish, uses L1 German and L3 Danish with the children in the L3 environment)

In sum, we can see that language choice for emotion speech acts is governed not only by language dominance, social context, linguistic competence of the interlocutors and perceived language emotionality, but also by affective resources offered by the languages in question (and the speakers’ competence and level of comfort with these resources). Some languages offer an appealing array of terms of endearment, others possess diminutives that can be adopted creatively, and yet others allow parents to utter ‘I love you’ ten times a day.

Conclusions

Together, the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the webquestionnaire responses allow me to add perceived language emotionality and cross-linguistic differences in affective repertoires to the list of factors that influence parental language choice in bi- and multilingual families. The data also suggest that L1 is not always the language of emotions for bilingual parents. Adult second language socialisation in the private space of the family may make other languages seem equally – if not more – emotional than the first. This means that parental choices are not an either/or proposition: Many draw on multiple linguistic repertoires, uttering ‘I love you’ in one language, endearments in another, and ‘Go clean that room!’ in yet another.

Clearly, these are preliminary results, based on self-reports and not observations (but see Luykx, 2003; Zentella, 1997). They are, however, still helpful in a number of ways. Firstly, they call into question the popular and oversimplified assumption that in late bilingualism, L1 is always the language of emotions and LX the language of distance or detachment. Secondly, they point to a dissociation between perceived language emotionality and language choice for emotional expression. This dissociation allows me to question what is meant by the ‘language of emotions’, whether it is the language that elicits the highest negative or positive arousal, or the language which one favours for

emotional expression, as the two are not necessarily the same, especially for L1 attriters.

The qualitative analysis of the responses also points to the underlying discourse of emotional primacy of the first language whereby the use of the L1 is seen as ‘natural’ and the preference for the LX may appear as ‘strange’ and requires justification. While this discourse reflects the perceptions of many speakers, it may also be harmful in ‘locking people into’ a particular language and making their own verbal choices and behaviours seem ‘strange’ if they opt for the LX. The discourse of first language primacy oversimplifies the reality of multilingual existence, where additional language socialisation may change speakers’ perceptions of language emotionality and allow them to invent new emotional personae. At the same time, the emotional tie of many speakers to their first language is a reality that deserves to be acknowledged. It is this reality that underlies the plight of many immigrant parents and grandparents who feel that they are losing the emotional connection to children who grow up in a language different from their own. This plight is poignantly worded by Mrs Vela, a Spanish-dominant grandmother of English-dominant children in a family of Mexican descent in Texas:

Sería muy bonito que... mis nietas me entendieran bien lo que yo les quería decir porque era una forma de, acercarme más a ellas pa’ conocerlas, o que ellas me conocieran a mi... Porque yo podía expresarles mis sentimientos, mis sueños con ellas, aconsejarlas, y ellas me entendían... Y se me hace que en español es más DULCE... emotiva más: la conversación de una abuelita con su... nieta. Y en inglés pos no podría... hablarles con el corazón...

It would be beautiful for... my granddaughters to truly understand what I wanted to say because it was a way of, getting closer to them and knowing them, or for them to know me... Because I could express my feelings, my dreams with them, to advise them, and they could understand me... And it seems to me that it’s sweeter in Spanish, more emotional: the conversation of a grandmother with her... granddaughter. And in English well I couldn’t... speak to them from the heart... (Schechter & Bayley, 1997: 534)

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Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Dr Aneta Pavlenko, College of Education, CITE Department, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA (apavlenk@temple.edu).

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