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## **Navigating Bilingualism: Exploring Language Dynamics in Indonesian Children Reluctant to Speak with Parents Using Foreign Language**

*Muhammad Arinal Rahman*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Szeged, Hungary; [arinalrahman@gmail.com](mailto:arinalrahman@gmail.com)

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*Received: 20 December 2023*

*Accepted: 13 March 2024*

*Published: 18 July 2024*

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### **Abstract**

Despite the acknowledged benefits of bilingualism in children's language development and executive functioning, a significant gap persists in understanding instances where bilingual children actively avoid using their acquired language skills with their parents. This study addresses this gap by examining the factors contributing to the reluctance of Indonesian children proficient in foreign languages to speak them with their parents. Through qualitative exploration deeply embedded in the participants' cultural and linguistic context, the research focuses on parental influence and intergenerational dynamics. This theme underscores parents' pivotal role in shaping bilingual children's language choices and preferences, revealing insights into their tendency to avoid speaking a foreign language. The complex dynamics of language dominance and exposure in bilingual families, influenced by factors such as parental beliefs, language policies, and the broader sociocultural context, are explored. The interplay between parental guidance and a child's preferences underscores the intricate nature of language dynamics within the family. Additionally, the study examines how navigating multicultural environments within bilingual families significantly impacts bilingual children. This unique case sheds light on how parental influence and cultural exposure jointly shape a child's bilingual language preferences, providing a nuanced understanding of language choices within a family setting.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, language dynamics, language reluctance, multicultural environments



**To cite this article:** Rahman, M. A. (2024). Navigating bilingualism: Exploring language dynamics in Indonesian children reluctant to speak with parents using foreign language. *SALEE: Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education*, 5(2), 379-396. <https://doi.org/10.35961/salee.v5i2.1202>

**DOI: 10.35961/salee.v5i2.1202**

## 1. Introduction

Bilingualism is increasingly prevalent worldwide, with estimates suggesting that over half of the global population is bilingual (Grosjean, 2021). In the Indonesian context, English is widely taught in schools, resulting in many children acquiring proficiency in both English and Bahasa Indonesia (Zein et al., 2020). However, the development of bilingualism in Indonesian children is influenced by various factors, including early exposure to multiple languages, effective parenting styles, and educational support (Andriani et al., 2022). However, despite extensive research exploring code-switching and code-mixing patterns in children acquiring a second language (Nurjaleka & Supriatnaningsih, 2021), there remains a gap in understanding instances where bilingual children actively avoid using their acquired language skills with their parents.

Specific instances of avoidance or reluctance warrant deeper investigation (Dumanig et al., 2013). As King and Fogle (2013) emphasized, selective language use within families reveals complex identity negotiations shaped by parental influence, social contexts, and evolving child preferences. This phenomenon is crucial to explore, considering parents' pivotal role in shaping early language exposure and dominance, which has lasting effects (Meisel, 2007). However, limited research has explored children's active avoidance of foreign language use with parents, a gap this study aims to address.

Investigating why bilingual children refrain from using languages with parents that they comfortably use with others can provide vital insights into language identity, family communication, and parental impact. As De Houwer (2021) argued, parents influence language practices by acting as 'linguistic gatekeepers.' However, children's agency in determining preferences is also salient, evidenced in the notion of 'family language policy' (Smith-Christmas, 2016). Situating the inquiry within Indonesia can illuminate culturally grounded perspectives on navigating multilingual environments, answering Jafari et al.'s (2023) calls for diverse bilingual research. As a result, this study focuses on Indonesian children proficient in English who are reluctant to speak the language with their parents.

Given that, the cognitive advantages and social dynamics associated with bilingualism, the specific circumstances in which bilingual children actively avoid using their acquired language skills with their parents remain underexplored. Limited attention which has been

given to understanding the reasons behind this phenomenon, lead potential impact on children's language development, and its implications for family relationships. Addressing this research gap is crucial for comprehensively understanding bilingual language use, particularly within family dynamics. Through qualitative exploration and analysis, this study aims to shed light on the factors contributing to the reluctance of Indonesian children proficient in English to speak the language with their parents, providing insights for educators, psychologists, and parents on effective strategies for fostering positive bilingual language development and promoting a supportive linguistic environment within the family.

## 2. Literature Review

Bilingualism, the ability to proficiently communicate in two or more languages, is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors like family language dynamics and language policies. Research in this domain explores the intricate interplay between language acquisition, maintenance, and use within diverse family contexts.

Extensive research documents the educational, cognitive, and social benefits of bilingualism in children, including enhanced problem-solving, multitasking, and communication skills (Syurganda, 2021; Makarova et al., 2022). Studies in the Indonesian context have explored various aspects of bilingual development, including code-switching patterns (Nurjaleka & Supriatnaningsih, 2021), parental strategies for promoting bilingualism (Chang & Suparmi, 2022), and factors influencing English proficiency (Andriani et al., 2022).

Wąsikiewicz-Firlej and Lankiewicz (2019) examined the family language policy (FLP) of a Polish-Japanese family residing in the UK, highlighting how FLPs are formulated and implemented in multicultural settings. Their study emphasizes the importance of examining FLPs in multicultural families to understand language negotiation and maintenance.

Another study by Li (2012) explored how Chinese-Australian immigrant families support bilingual heritage language development in preschoolers through everyday interactions. This study elucidates the strategies and challenges involved in maintaining heritage languages in diasporic contexts, highlighting the role of family dynamics in shaping language outcomes.

Moreover, Galera and Poveda (2022) investigated linguistic socialization and communication practices within Spanish families led by single mothers or lesbian couples. This study reveals how familial structures and social contexts intersect with language socialization processes, enriching our understanding of language acquisition and transmission in non-traditional families.

Similarly, Wilson (2019) examined the FLPs of transnational French-English bilingual families in England, revealing how these policies influence language use and proficiency. This study underscores the importance of considering the sociocultural context of

bilingualism and the role of parental language choices in shaping language acquisition trajectories. Wąsikiewicz-Firlej and Daly (2023) conducted case studies exploring how families establish and enact FLPs for early and additive bilingualism. By focusing on primary caretakers' speech and interactional strategies, these studies provided insights into the micro-level dynamics of language socialization within the family context. These studies contribute significantly to our understanding of bilingualism, language planning, and language use within families. By examining diverse family structures and sociocultural contexts, researchers gain valuable insights into the complex interplay between individual, familial, and societal factors influencing bilingual language development and maintenance.

However, a critical gap remains in understanding children's active avoidance or reluctance to speak a foreign language, specifically English, with their parents despite displaying proficiency in school and social settings. King and Fogle (2013) highlight selective language use within families as indicative of complex identity negotiations shaped by diverse factors. De Houwer's (2021) concept of "linguistic gatekeeping" emphasizes parents' role in influencing children's language environment and dominance patterns.

While research acknowledges the role of family dynamics, few studies have explicitly focused on bilingual children's avoidance of foreign language use with parents as the primary research problem. This gap needs to be addressed considering the critical role parents play as language "gatekeepers" and the impact of early exposure on long-term proficiency (Meisel, 2007). Understanding children's deliberate reluctance can provide deeper insights into the emotional factors, family communication patterns, identity negotiations, and parental influence that shape bilingual language development.

Exploring this phenomenon within the Indonesian context can uncover culturally rooted perspectives on navigating multilingual environments and identity, aligning with Jafari et al.'s (2023) emphasis on diverse bilingual research. This situated qualitative inquiry focus on parent-child language reluctance through interviews and observations. The findings generate crucial knowledge to guide interventions that assist families in promoting children's bilingual proficiency development in a supportive manner. Thus, this study aims to address the notable research gap around bilingual children's avoidance of foreign language use with parents through an in-depth exploration of the factors shaping this phenomenon in the Indonesian context.

### **3. Method**

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted to unravel the intricate language dynamics among bilingual children in Indonesia. Despite their English proficiency, these children are reluctant to use it with their parents. This exploration is prompted by the growing interest in understanding the complexities of bilingual language acquisition within the familial context (Lloyd-Smith; Tseng, 2020). The study employs a case study design chosen for its capacity

to provide in-depth insights into individual experiences and behaviours (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Yin, 2018). This approach aims to unravel the factors influencing children's bilingual language use patterns and contribute to a broader understanding of language acquisition.

### ***3.1. Research Design***

The chosen qualitative approach aligns with the study's objective of delving into the nuanced aspects of bilingual language use. A case study methodology is deemed most appropriate for capturing the complexity of individual language practices and their sociocultural context (Ritchie et al., 2013). This strategy enables a thorough examination of the phenomenon, focusing on the specific experiences of bilingual children who resist using English with their parents.

### ***3.2. Participants***

#### ***3.2.1. Participant 1 - Amira (29 years old)***

Amira, a 29-year-old female, has a rich linguistic background and is proficient in Banjarese, Javanese, Indonesian, and Arabic. Her formative years (ages 6 to 12) were notably spent in an Arabian country, contributing to her unique cultural and linguistic experiences. Despite her proficiency in Arabic, she consciously avoids speaking the language with her father at home. This intriguing linguistic choice within the family setting prompts a deeper exploration into her reluctance to communicate with her father in Arabic. Amira's maturity positions her to provide articulate insights into the nuanced factors influencing her language preferences during her childhood.

#### ***3.2.2. Participant 2 - Budi (29 years old)***

Budi, a 29-year-old male, emerges as a polyglot with a diverse linguistic repertoire encompassing Banjarese, Javanese, Indonesian, Arabic, English, and some Japanese. His preference for using Banjarese, his native language, when communicating with his mother adds an interesting dimension to the study. This deliberate avoidance of foreign languages in favour of his native tongue raises questions about the role of language in shaping familial bonds and individual perceptions of linguistic identity. Budi's multilingual background provides a rich context to explore the underlying motivations for his language choices within the family dynamic.

#### ***3.2.3. Participant 3 - Sarah (Parent in Hungary for four years)***

Sarah, a parent residing in Hungary for the past four years, faces unique challenges in maintaining language preferences within her multicultural household. Despite her efforts to encourage the use of Bahasa Indonesia, her child, born in Hungary, is fluent in English and predominantly communicates with Sarah in English. Notably, Sarah's daughter also

possesses some proficiency in Hungarian but exhibits a preference for English. This scenario adds an intriguing layer to the study, providing insights into the complexities of language dynamics in a multicultural environment. Sarah's experiences highlight the nuanced interplay between parental efforts, cultural surroundings, and a child's language preferences, contributing valuable perspectives to the study.

#### ***3.2.4. Participant 4 - Mark (Parent of a polyglot son in Malaysia)***

Mark, a 29-year-old male, is the parent of a polyglot son currently residing in Malaysia. Drawing from his two-year experience in Malaysia during adolescence, Mark contributes a distinctive perspective to the study. As a parent, his insights offer valuable reflections on the intricate dynamics of language within cross-cultural family contexts. Notably, Mark's son prefers the Aceh language over Malay or English, adding an intriguing layer to the study. This unique case sheds light on how parental influence and cultural exposure shape a child's language preferences, providing a nuanced understanding of bilingualism within a familial setting. Exploring Mark's perspective further enriches the exploration of the factors influencing language choices.

### ***3.3. Data Collection***

This study's foundation rests upon utilising semi-structured interviews as the primary instruments for comprehensive data collection, following the methodological framework proposed by Seidman (2013). The research focuses on two distinct participant categories: individuals with firsthand experiences as children living overseas and parents who grapple with raising children reluctant to speak foreign languages. These qualitative interviews were conducted exclusively in the Indonesian language to ensure a nuanced understanding of the intricacies surrounding language dynamics within cross-cultural family settings.

The choice of the Indonesian language as the communication medium during interviews is intentional, aiming to facilitate a clearer and more profound comprehension of participants' experiences and perspectives. By conducting interviews in the language native to the participants, the research seeks to establish a deeper rapport, fostering an environment where participants can articulate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences with greater precision and authenticity.

The qualitative interviews delved into the participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges regarding language use within a cross-cultural family context. Both retrospective insights from individuals recounting their childhood experiences abroad and current reflections from parents navigating language challenges with their children were explored. The goal is to capture a multifaceted understanding of the factors influencing language choices and preferences.

To ensure comprehensive data capture, interviews were recorded through audio recordings, allowing for precise documentation of participants' responses. Additionally, field

notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and any nuances that may enrich the analysis. Throughout the study, a reflective journal was maintained to document my evolving insights, methodological considerations, and potential avenues for further exploration.

In essence, the research employs a qualitative approach deeply embedded in the cultural and linguistic context of the participants, striving to unravel the intricate layers of language dynamics within the unique cross-cultural family settings explored in this study.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

The research design incorporates a robust analytical framework, employing thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This methodological choice aims to identify, analyse systematically, and report patterns (themes) within the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted in the Indonesian language.

The analysis process commenced with inductive coding, allowing for the emergence of initial codes directly from the raw data. This phase involves a detailed and open dataset exploration, highlighting recurring ideas, concepts, or expressions related to language dynamics within cross-cultural families. Through this inductive approach, the research aims to capture participants' diverse experiences and perspectives.

Following the generation of initial codes, axial coding was applied to explore connections and relationships between these codes. This step involves organising the codes into categories and examining their interplay. The analysis seeks to unveil underlying patterns, dependencies, and associations within the data, providing a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in language dynamics.

The final stage of the analysis involves selective coding, where core themes are refined and identified. This process requires a higher level of abstraction, enabling me to distil essential insights and overarching patterns from the multitude of codes. Selective coding contributes to developing a coherent narrative that encapsulates the central themes and variations in participants' experiences, shedding light on the intricate nature of language choices within the family context.

In essence, the thematic analysis serves as a robust and flexible methodological framework, allowing for a deep exploration of the qualitative data collected in this study. By systematically progressing from inductive coding to axial coding and finally to selective coding, the research endeavours to offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of language dynamics within cross-cultural families, as illuminated by the voices and experiences of the participants.

### ***3.5. Ethical Consideration***

Informed consent was a cornerstone of ethical practice, with participants fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities. I engaged in reflexivity, acknowledging personal biases and reflecting on their influence on the research process (Trussell, 2014). Objectivity was a continuous process, with reflexivity documented in the reflective journal.

### ***3.6. Rigour and Validity***

Incorporating triangulation, which involves combining interview data with observational findings, significantly bolsters the study's credibility and trustworthiness, as Patton (2014) suggested. Another vital aspect of ensuring the rigour of the research involves member checking, allowing participants to review and provide feedback on the study's findings. These strategies contribute to the validation and accuracy of the results and add a layer of transparency to the research process.

Moreover, the study uniquely encompasses two participant types, offering a dual perspective: those who experienced childhood overseas and parents navigating the challenge of raising children hesitant to use foreign languages. Through qualitative interviews, the study seeks to illuminate the intricate language dynamics within cross-cultural family settings, providing a comprehensive understanding from both the child and parent viewpoints. This dual perspective enhances the depth and richness of the study's insights.

## **4. Finding and Discussion**

Exploring how languages work within bilingual families reveals fascinating insights through four main themes. In Theme 1, "Language Comfort and Expression," this study dives into the emotions guiding language choices, sharing stories like Amira's and Budi's. Theme 2, "Early Language Exposure and Dominance," focuses on how childhood experiences stick with us, especially regarding language. Theme 3, "Navigating Multicultural Environments," takes a closer look at the perks and challenges of bilingual families, highlighting the need for flexibility in diverse language settings. Lastly, Theme 4, "Parental Influence and Intergenerational Dynamics," explores how parents shape language exposure, giving us a better understanding of the intricate connections between generations. In the upcoming sections, this study breaks down each theme, uncovering the complexities of language dynamics and gaining valuable insights into what influences language choices in the unique world of bilingual families.

### ***4.1. Theme 1: Language comfort and expression***

Amira and Budi emphasized the importance of emotional comfort in their language choices in the interviews. Despite being proficient in Arabic, Amira deliberately avoided speaking it with her father, opting for Banjarese and Indonesian, languages she found more comfortable

and expressive. Amira explained, "*Jadi, sekarang lebih sering pake bahasa Banjar ketimbang bahasa Arab*" ("Now I use Banjarese more than Arabic"). Her desire for emotional comfort and expressiveness in communication drove this choice. Budi, a polyglot, echoed similar sentiments, stating, "*Keuntungannya sih lebih ke ngerasa luwes, bisa ngomong sama siapa aja tanpa ada hambatan bahasa*" ("The advantage is that I feel more flexible; I can talk to anyone without language barriers"). Budi's preference for Banjarese, his native language, reflected the emotional connection and comfort associated with using one's mother tongue.

Amira's experience reflected the role of emotional comfort, where she felt more expressive using Banjarese. She shared, "*Jadi, akhirnya lebih ke arah kenyamanan aja, karena udah jadi kebiasaan gitu dari kecil*" ("So, in the end, it's more about comfort because it became a habit since I was a child"). Budi also highlighted the connection between emotional comfort and expressiveness, emphasising the advantage of using Banjarese for smoother communication.

Both interviews underscored that language proficiency alone did not dictate language preference. Amira's proficiency in Arabic did not translate into a preference for using it at home. She elaborated, "*Pas masih kecil dulu, gue sering ngerasa kalau bahasa Arab yang digunakan sama ayah saya kurang asyik dan kurang bagus gitu*" ("When I was little, I often felt that the Arabic my father used was not enjoyable and not good"). Budi's multilingual proficiency did not diminish the significance of Banjarese in his interactions with his mother. His statement, "*Tapi lagi pula, itu juga tergantung kebiasaan dan lingkungan sekitar sih*" ("But then again, it also depends on habits and the surrounding environment"), reflects the role of emotional and environmental factors in language choice.

Scientifically, the findings align with the socioemotional theory of language development, emphasising language acquisition's emotional and social aspects (Vygotsky, 1978). The emotional connection to a language, as seen in Amira and Budi's preferences, resonates with Vygotsky's theory, highlighting emotions' role in shaping language development.

The phenomenon of bilingual children avoiding speaking a foreign language with their parents is complex and influenced by various factors, reflecting concerns about language comfort and expression. One significant aspect is the proficiency of non-native-speaking parents in a foreign language, potentially resulting in communication challenges and discomfort for the child (Hudry et al., 2018). The linguistic abilities of parents play a pivotal role in shaping the language dynamics within the family, as children may opt for languages where they feel more at ease and expressive.

Moreover, parents may harbour concerns about the potential impact of non-native language use on their child's language development. This worry can manifest in restricting exposure to one language, often favouring the community's dominant language (Schwartz &

Verschik, 2013). The influence of societal pressures, including state language policies, adds complexity. Bilingual families may grapple with the challenge of adhering to heritage languages while navigating the dominant language of their environment, reflecting the intricate interplay between family language practices and broader sociocultural factors (McCabe, 2017).

A lack of awareness or knowledge about scholarly approaches to bilingual parenting may influence parents' decision-making in maintaining or restricting exposure to foreign languages. The absence of guidance on effective bilingual practices could lead parents to rely on intuitive methods, potentially impacting the child's language choices within the family setting (Park, 2014).

This aligns with sociolinguistic perspectives highlighting that language choices are not solely determined by proficiency but are influenced by comfort and habitual environmental use. The reluctance of bilingual children to speak a foreign language with their parents, as discussed, intertwines with parental proficiency, language development concerns, and societal pressures. Sociolinguistically, this phenomenon can be analyzed through language attitudes and the impact of societal language policies on bilingual family practices, emphasizing the need for nuanced interventions considering emotional and environmental influences.

The reluctance of bilingual children to speak a foreign language with their parents results from interconnected factors. These include parental proficiency, language development concerns, societal pressures, and a potential lack of awareness about effective bilingual parenting methods. Understanding this multifaceted perspective is crucial for developing interventions and support mechanisms that empower bilingual families to navigate these challenges and foster positive language experiences within the home.

#### ***4.2. Theme 2: Early language exposure and dominance in bilingual families***

The language dynamics within bilingual families are intricately linked to early language exposure and dominance, a theme the participants' narratives underscored. Their childhood experiences highlighted the profound impact of early exposure on language preferences and dominance within the family.

For instance, Participant 2, Budi, born and raised in Malaysia, revealed, "*Waktu kecil, gue lebih sering pake bahasa Inggris sama orang tua. Tapi karena itu juga bahasa sehari-hari di lingkungan sekitar, ya terbiasa aja. Enggak cuma satu bahasa sih, tapi Inggris lebih dominan.*". ("When I was little, I used English more often with my parents. But because it was also the everyday language in the surrounding environment, it just became a habit. It's not just one language, though; English is more dominant."). Budi's experience resonates with the broader theme, emphasizing that the dominant language in the immediate environment tends to shape linguistic preferences.

Scientifically, research by Pearson and Fernández (1994) supports this observation, suggesting that the language used most frequently in a child's interactions becomes their dominant language. The study emphasises the crucial role of early language exposure in determining language dominance. Additionally, Pearson and Fernández highlight that, despite attempts to introduce additional languages, the dominant language in daily interactions typically prevails.

Participant 3, a parent in Hungary, shared insights into their child's language development: "*Waktu masih kecil, sebelum kami pindah ke Hungaria, dia lebih sering menggunakan bahasa Indonesia bersama kami.*" ("When they were still little, before we moved to Hungary, they used Indonesian more often with us."). This echoes the research of De Houwer (2009), emphasising that the language spoken most frequently in early childhood interactions becomes the dominant language. De Houwer's work affirms that the language patterns established during this period often persist into later years.

The theme of early language exposure and dominance underscores the pivotal role of a child's linguistic environment during the formative years. The participants' narratives align with scientific findings, emphasising the lasting impact of childhood language experiences on language preferences and dominance within bilingual families.

The intricate interplay between early language exposure and dominance in bilingual families significantly shapes the language behaviours of bilingual children, potentially leading to their reluctance to speak the foreign language with their parents. Extensive research, as highlighted by Hoff (2018), underscores the crucial role of the quantity and quality of language exposure, along with the child's individual language use, in the development of bilingual skills. Notably, bilingual parents may consciously limit exposure to the non-native language, a decision that can markedly impact communicative patterns during parent-child interactions (Hudry et al., 2018). Furthermore, intriguing insights from studies, such as that by Byers-Heinlein et al. (2017), reveal that young monolingual children exhibit language-based social biases, displaying a preference for native language speakers over those using foreign languages. In contrast, bilingual children demonstrate a more flexible attitude, affiliating similarly with both monolingual and bilingual speakers (Lam & Matthews, 2020). The asymmetry observed in inter-sentential code-switching among bilingual children provides additional nuances, potentially linked to mechanisms of inhibitory control and indicative of their dominance status in each language (Puig-Mayenco et al., 2018). In summary, the intricate dynamics of language dominance and exposure in bilingual families play a pivotal role in shaping the language choices and preferences of bilingual children, offering insights into their tendency to avoid speaking the foreign language with their parents.

### 4.3. Theme 3: Navigating multicultural environments in bilingual families

The participants' narratives shed light on the multifaceted nature of navigating multicultural environments, a theme that encapsulates both advantages and challenges in language use within bilingual families.

Participant 4, Mark, who spent two years in Malaysia during adolescence, exemplified the advantages of being multilingual: "*Keuntungannya sih lebih ke ngerasa luwes, bisa ngomong sama siapa aja tanpa ada hambatan bahasa. Komunikasi jadi lebih lancar dan lebih mudah nyambung.*" Mark's experience underscores multilingualism's adaptability and communicative advantages, aligning with Grosjean's research (2010). Grosjean emphasizes multilingualism's cognitive and social benefits, including enhanced communication skills and a broader cultural understanding.

However, the interviews also illuminated the challenges, especially in maintaining cultural and linguistic balance within the family. Participant 3, a parent in Hungary, expressed this challenge: "*Tantangannya mungkin lebih pada kurangnya keintiman komunikasi di rumah, karena kami sering menggunakan bahasa Indonesia.*" ("The challenge may be more about the lack of intimacy in communication at home because we often use the Indonesian language."). This echoes the work of Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza (2018), which explores the intricate interplay between language, culture, and family dynamics. Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza emphasize that maintaining a balance between the heritage language and the host culture's language poses challenges for bilingual families, potentially impacting intimacy and familial communication.

The theme of navigating multicultural environments is further supported by the experiences of Participant 1, Amira, who spent her formative years in an Arabian country. She shared, "*Sebenarnya lebih ke kurang nyaman sih, tapi gue ngerasa jadi lebih ekspresif karena bisa pilih bahasa yang lebih nyaman buat gue.*" ("Actually, it's more about feeling uncomfortable, but I feel more expressive because I can choose a language that is more comfortable for me.") Amira's experience highlights the nuanced emotional aspects of language use in multicultural contexts, aligning with the findings of Dewaele (2005). Dewaele emphasizes the emotional dimensions of language choices, emphasizing that individuals may choose languages that evoke a sense of comfort and emotional connection.

In essence, the theme of navigating multicultural environments encompasses the diverse experiences of bilingual families, emphasizing the need for adaptability and the challenges of balancing linguistic and cultural elements within the family. The dynamics of navigating multicultural environments within bilingual families exert a substantial influence on bilingual children, potentially leading them to avoid speaking a foreign language with their parents. Central to this phenomenon are the beliefs and language strategies employed by parents, as underscored by studies such as Mak et al. (2023) and Showstack & García-Mateus (2022).

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Parental attitudes, whether supportive of bilingualism or favoring the societal language, wield significant influence over children's language preferences and practices (Raoufi Masouleh, 2014). The language and literacy environment within the home, encompassing elements like shared reading and exposure to the heritage language, emerge as pivotal factors shaping children's language development, echoing the findings of De Houwer (2021). Furthermore, the transition to full-time schooling and the impact of peer interactions contribute to variations in language mixing and preference among bilingual children, as illuminated by Daussà & Qian (2022). In summary, the intricacies of language use dynamics in bilingual families are multifaceted, intertwined with diverse factors, including parental beliefs, language policies, and the broader sociocultural context.

#### **4.4. Theme 4: Parental influence and intergenerational dynamics in bilingual families**

The theme of parental influence and intergenerational dynamics highlights parents' pivotal role in shaping language exposure and choices within bilingual families.

Participant 3, Sarah, residing in Hungary, shared her experiences: "Her child, born in Hungary, is fluent in English and primarily communicates with Sarah in English, despite efforts to encourage the use of Bahasa Indonesia at home." Sarah's situation reflects parents' significant influence in determining the linguistic environment at home. This resonates with the research of De Houwer (2007), emphasizing that parents serve as linguistic gatekeepers, influencing the languages their children adopt as dominant.

Moreover, the interviews revealed that despite parents' efforts to establish language rules, the children's comfort often influenced language selection. Participant 2, Budi, a polyglot, mentioned, "*Lebih ke spontanitas aja, ngikutin keadaan.*" ("More like spontaneity, just going with the flow."). Budi's response emphasises language use's dynamic and spontaneous nature within the family, showcasing that despite parental guidelines, children may opt for languages aligned with their immediate context. This aligns with the findings of Hernandez (2013), who argue that children's language choices are not solely shaped by formal rules but are influenced by social context and personal comfort.

The interplay between parental guidance and children's individual preferences underscores the complexity of language dynamics within cross-cultural families. Participant 4, Mark, articulated this complexity when discussing his son's language choices: "Mark's son, a polyglot with proficiency in multiple languages, presents an intriguing case for understanding how parental influence and cultural exposure shape a child's language preferences." This resonates with the research of King and Fogle (2013), who emphasize the bidirectional nature of language influence within families, with children actively shaping the family's linguistic environment.

Parental influence and intergenerational dynamics in bilingual families can influence bilingual children to avoid speaking a foreign language with their parents. The parental

beliefs and perceptions about bilingualism play a significant role in shaping the language practices within the family (Mak et al., 2023; Showstack & García-Mateus, 2022). Some parents may have negative views about bilingualism, perceiving disadvantages such as language delays and societal prejudice (Karagöz & Erdemir, 2022). This can create a reluctance to use the foreign language at home, leading to language avoidance between parents and children (Petani et al., 2021). Additionally, the dominance of the majority language in the society can also impact bilingual abilities, with younger children experiencing more difficulty in maintaining bilingualism compared to their older siblings (Seal, 2013). This difficulty can result in heritage language avoidance and a weakening of family interaction, prompting middle children to take on the role of translators within the family. Overall, parental beliefs, societal influences, and intergenerational dynamics can contribute to bilingual children avoiding speaking a foreign language with their parents.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study delves into the intricate landscape of language dynamics within bilingual families, revealing four key themes. The first theme explores the emotional dimensions influencing language choices, emphasising the significance of comfort and expressiveness. The second theme highlights the enduring impact of early language exposure on preferences and dominance, drawing from participant experiences and scientific insights. The third theme encapsulates the diverse advantages and challenges bilingual families face in navigating multicultural environments, emphasising adaptability. Lastly, the fourth theme unravels the pivotal role of parental influence in shaping language choices, emphasising the bidirectional nature of language dynamics within the family. Together, these themes offer a nuanced understanding of factors influencing language choices within bilingual family settings, providing valuable insights for supporting positive language experiences at home. The narratives of participants like Amira and Budi underscore the significance of emotional comfort in language choices, revealing that proficiency alone does not dictate preferences. Early language exposure emerges as a crucial factor, aligning with research on childhood language dominance. The challenges of navigating multicultural environments, as articulated by participants like Mark and Sarah, highlight the need for adaptability and the delicate balance required in maintaining linguistic and cultural harmony within families. The theme of parental influence emphasises the intricate interplay between parental guidance and individual preferences, shaping the complex landscape of language use. While these findings provide valuable insights, the study acknowledges the limitations inherent to qualitative research. Future endeavours incorporating mixed methods and longitudinal perspectives hold promise for enriching our comprehension of bilingual language development within diverse family contexts.

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