

Background of the project

Typically, parents want their children to have as good a life as possible. They make enormous efforts to support their children's development, e.g. reading books, taking care of a well-balanced diet, making sure that children spend enough time outside, or enrolling children in various classes that potentially enhance child development. Some of the parents who want to support the language skills of their children decide to practice parenting in a non-native language. This happens when one (or both) parent(s) of a child decide to address the child in another language than their native language (and another language than the language of the community). For example, Polish-speaking parents who were born and raised in Polish monolingual families, despite living with their family in Poland, decide to address their child(ren) in English, for at least some of the time.

It seems that parenting in a non-native language is growing in popularity, especially in countries where parents are well-educated but on an everyday basis speak a language of lower prestige than English, and knowledge of English is considered to be essential for academic and professional success, e.g. in Eastern Europe (e.g. Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) or in Asia (e.g. Korea, Japan). However, there is no research that investigates the scale or the linguistic, cognitive, and emotional consequences of this phenomenon. So far, there is not a single study that would analyze the impact of parenting in a non-native language on the life of the family, a child's well-being, or her/his language or cognitive development.

Methods

In the project, we planned five studies that will make it possible to describe parenting in a non-native language from various perspectives. First, we will estimate the scale of this phenomenon by asking parents of first-graders in 100 schools whether they had ever practiced parenting in a non-native language. Second, in a questionnaire study, we will collect data about the socio-economic, psychological, and language environment in families who practice parenting in a non-native language. Third, we will compare the quality of parental language in the two languages (Polish and English) in families who practice parenting in a non-native language, to learn whether their English is of comparable quality to Polish. Fourth, we will analyze the language and cognitive skills of children whose parents practice parenting in a non-native language, as compared to monolingual children and to “naturally” bilingual children. Finally, we will follow the language development of children whose parents practice parenting in a non-native language from the age of saying their first words to the age of entering preschool.

Expected results of the project

The project is pioneering in its nature, as it is the very first project in the world to systematically study the phenomenon of parenting in a non-native language. We hope that the results of the project will fill a large gap in research on this topic. We believe that studying the characteristics and consequences of parenting in a non-native language will make it possible to formulate some guidelines for parents who would like to practice this parenting style, e.g. in terms of how often the two languages should be spoken and in which contexts to make the child's environment optimal for development of language and cognitive skills without any side effects.