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The home–school connection, the development of Spanish repertoires, and the school adaptation process in Latino children: a dynamic ecological understanding

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Abstract: This paper aims to contribute to research and policy that supports Latino children in early education regarding their transition into the school system and their bilingual development. It presents the results of a one-year longitudinal ethnographic study of four Latino children starting school at a transitional bilingual kindergarten in the Boston area. The analysis identifies dynamics and trends at the micro and meso levels that show that Spanish use and development in Latino children cannot be fully understood and supported if we consider it an individual ability instead of an organic and intrinsic component of broader dynamic socialization, emotional, and academic processes (such as the transition to school) of which English is also a part and in which parents and teachers participate. Recommendations for designing and implementing comprehensive programs to engage Latino families and educators to support transitions, bilingual development, and academic performance in young Latino children are presented.

Keywords: early childhood; ecological framework; Latino children; parent–teacher communication; school adaptation; Spanish use

1 Introduction

The vast majority of Latino children in the United States are socialized in Spanish by their families (Pew Research Center 2013), even when this trend declines as their immigrant connections become distant (López et al. 2018). Latino children form affective bonds in the language (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001; Vélez-Ibáñez 1996) and learn how to become linguistically and culturally competent members of their communities (He 2011; Ochs and Schieffelin 2011). Spanish is a significant part of their ethnolinguistic identity, central to building their sense of belonging and key to

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strong developmental processes (Marks et al. 2013). Nevertheless, research shows that once Latino children enter school, they need to learn new socialization patterns in English to integrate into the social life of the school and learn academic content (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Massey 2013). Spanish use tends to weaken at that point, with significant affective and mental health consequences for children as some lose their primary means of communication with and connections to family members and community (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001).

The transition from home to school is a milestone for any child, but it is particularly important for immigrant Spanish-speaking children (García-Sellers 1996; Paulick et al. 2021; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2015) since the new English-speaking environment imposes significant linguistic and cultural discontinuities (Baquedano-López and Mangual Figueroa 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2015). Therefore, language continuity between home and school has been considered a key factor for immigrant children to succeed in these transitions and their overall school adaptation process. Bilingual programs aim to provide Latino children with such continuity and access to Spanish academic content (Valentino and Reardon 2015).

Nonetheless, immigrant children's success or failure to transition, adapt, and succeed at school is not determined solely by language continuity or the language the child speaks at home (Brizuela and García-Sellers 1999; García-Sellers 1996). Research has shown that many other factors come into play, such as parents' levels of education, immigrant status, expectations and beliefs, parental involvement and disposition, socioeconomic status, and peer pressure (Akçinar 2013; García-Sellers 1996).

This consideration has a twofold implication for young Latino children: on the one hand, from a developmental and educational standpoint, support for young Latinos transitioning from home to school should be understood beyond the use of Spanish; on the other hand, from a linguistic perspective, although we know that many variables influence language development and maintenance – number of speakers, language vitality, social prestige, affinity to the native country, degree of family connections and identification, power relations, among others (He 2011) – in this paper, we argue that Spanish use and development in children cannot be fully understood if we consider it as an individual ability instead of as an intrinsic component of broader dynamic socialization, emotional, and academic processes – of which English is also a part – and in which parents and teachers participate.

Therefore, if we want to understand and support Latino children's use of their Spanish repertoires at critical developmental and linguistic moments, such as the transition from home to school, we need to approach language development from an interdisciplinary and ecological perspective that allows us to identify the

circumstances and mechanisms that foster or hinder Spanish use at the micro *and* the meso[1] levels implicated in such transition (García-Sellers 1996; Marks et al. 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2015). Ensuring a good transition between home and school, including Spanish, is particularly important for the socio-emotional well-being, identity development, and academic future of young Latino children, identified as the most underserved group in the United States (Gándara and Mordechay 2017; García and Jensen 2009). Research has shown that children who better adapt to school during their early ages have higher academic achievement, higher self-esteem, form better peer relations, and are less likely to drop out of school (Akçinar 2013; Haynes et al. 2003; Reynolds 1989).

Drawing from interdisciplinary (ethnographic, sociolinguistic, developmental psychology) and ecological perspectives (Bronfenbrenner 1979; García-Sellers 1996; Marks et al. 2013; Super and Harkness 1986), this paper presents the analysis of a one-year longitudinal study of four Latino children who were starting school at a transitional bilingual kindergarten in the Boston area, and participated in the Home–School Connection Program (García-Sellers 1996) that partnered with the public school where the bilingual program was housed. Each case study illustrates examples of ecologies in which each child followed different paths in their adaptation process, use of Spanish, learning English, and academic performance. Aware of the immense variability that bilingual development entails (Escobar and Tamis-LeMonda 2017), the goal of the analysis is to identify trends that integrate information from the individual, the micro, and the most levels to provide us with an understanding of children's Spanish use in organic relationships with other speakers and as part of broader socialization contexts and processes (García and Alonso 2021: 10).

In doing so, we aim to contribute to research and policy that supports Latino children in early education (Escobar and Tamis-LeMonda 2017: 90) in two main ways: first, following recent research calls (i.e. Marks et al. 2013; Paulick et al. 2021) by highlighting the importance of making *mesosystems* – in particular the relations and transactions between parents and teachers – sites of further research and program design to support Latino bilingual children; and second, by underscoring that, as Macías (2014) and Otheguy (2021) propose, the future of the Spanish language has to be thought of in terms of the future of its speakers. It is only by building solid ecologies that strengthen parent–teacher connections, provide access to bilingual programs and support young Latinos and youths' overall well-being that the Spanish language will continue to be used in future generations.

1 Within the ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979), the so-called microsystem refers to a specific context of development such as home, school, or group of peers. The mesosystem refers to the system that results from members of two microsystems interacting.

2 Language, ecological transitions, and the school adaptation process

Pioneers of the language socialization field, Ochs and Schieffelin (2011: 1) state that "Language is a fundamental medium in children's development of social and cultural knowledge and sensibilities". Children develop their linguistic repertoires within meaningful interactions with significant others (Halliday 1975), learning a broad range of linguistic affordances and socialization practices that they can take ownership of as members of their communities. Such interactions extend to several settings – home and school are among the most important.

In monolingual environments, families and schools tend to share the linguistic repertoire, sociocultural values, and expectations (García-Sellers 1996). The ecological transition between home and school – understood as a change in the child's position within her environment as the result of a change in setting, role, or both (for example, becoming a kindergartener) (Bronfenbrenner 1979: 26) – has a strong level of linguistic and cultural continuity that sets the basis for children to be more likely to have a successful adaptation process, leading to more stable conditions for academic achievement and success. Things are different in multilingual and multicultural environments where families and schools do not share language and socio-cultural values. Children must make significant, if not monumental, efforts to build a sense of belonging and maintain their ethnolinguistic identity (Silverstein 2003) as they juggle the pressures of assimilating into the mainstream through English while trying also to maintain their home culture and language (Baquedano-López and Mangual Figueroa 2011; Parra 2016; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001).

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) have proposed three patterns or styles of adaptation that children of immigration may follow as they transition into school and English-speaking environments: (1) embrace total assimilation and identification with American culture; (2) develop a new ethnic identity that selects aspects of both cultures; (3) develop an "adversarial" identity in their struggle to adapt to the mainstream society, increasing the stakes for dropping out of the school system. Another dynamic perspective on school adaptation is also offered by García-Sellers (1996). Based on systemic and ecological perspectives and providing an alternative approach of acculturation and academic achievement to explain school adaptation, García-Sellers (1996) conceptualizes the optimal school adaptation process as a *multiway accommodation process* by the parties involved – child, parents, and teachers – rather than a one-way acculturation process by the individual child. Thus, for García-Sellers (1996), children's adaptation to school varies according to their abilities along with the kind of networks of support parents and teachers can build around them. In this model, academic and social success is considered a triangular

enterprise between parents, children, and teachers (Brizuela and García-Sellers 1999; García-Sellers 1996; Parra Velasco and García-Sellers 2005).

The model is dynamic in that it proposes four general patterns of adaptation through which an immigrant child can move over the school year: non-adapted (the child remains under the influence of family culture and language); transferred (the child makes the transition to school but the effort entails rejecting their family's culture and language); adapted (the child learns both languages and navigates both environments' values and norms), and adapted with support (where parents and teachers work together to build continuity between home and school). Non-adapted and transferred patterns present more internal and external conflicts that the child tends to deal with alone. The adapted pattern can be a sign of a child's independence and ability to navigate the demands of different environments by themself. The adapted with support pattern brings the most benefits to children as parents and teachers come together to build common ground for the child's development.

Bronfenbrenner (1979: 6) proposed that the effective functioning of settings as contexts for development depends on the existence and nature of social interconnections with and between other settings and whether their members embark on joint participation, communication, and search for information about the other. That is why children's adaptation processes and overall development, including linguistic growth and academic achievement, benefit from strong connections between parents and teachers where they accommodate each other and build a support network for the child through continuity, common goals, and communication about how to achieve them (Brizuela and García-Sellers 1999; Shapiro and García-Sellers 2003).

As language is the most salient difference between immigrant homes and schools, the tendency is to assume that if parents, children, and teachers share the same language, good transitions and school success are guaranteed. Nevertheless, for some authors (Brizuela and García-Sellers 1999: 346), "focusing on the language discontinuities merely in terms of school success reflects a narrowness in the understanding of children's adaptation to school and an attention to only one factor that could possibly affect this process". At the same time, from a language development perspective, analyzing language development in a single setting (home *or* school) or decontextualizing it from the complex socialization processes it is part of, such as transitions and school adaptation, narrows our perspective and understanding of how children's Spanish repertoires unfold (or not) along the social and academic demands in the dominant language and between settings.

In what follows, I will briefly describe the home–school connection program that served the four children who are the focus of this article. I will then describe and compare these cases to illustrate four patterns of the interplay between the school adaptation process, Spanish development, English learning, and academic performance.

3 The home–school connection program

The Home–School Connection Program (H-SCP, Elliot-Pearson Department of Child Development, Tufts University)[2] served the immigrant Latino community that attended a transitional bilingual program in the Boston Metropolitan area. Based on García-Sellers' model of school adaptation (1996), the H-SCP had three main goals: first, to facilitate children's transition from home to kindergarten; second, to strengthen communication between parents and teachers through common goals; and third, to support children's academic success.

3.1 Methodology

H-SCP's interdisciplinary methodology was grounded in ethnographic work. Mediators/researchers were crucial figures in this program (including the author of this paper). Mediators had several tasks and collected data at different points throughout the academic year (cf. Table 1). Such tasks included: a) inviting families to participate in the program; b) making home visits to meet the child and the family; c) interviewing mothers and fathers,[3] when present. These interviews aimed to explore the immigration family history and overall satisfaction with their current lives, family support networks, family activities, and language(s) usage; d) assessing children's school readiness through activities identified as essential skills for entering kindergarten (writing name, letter and number recognition, shapes and colors, counting to 10, attention, fine motor skills, puzzles and recognition of patterns); e) making classroom observations and interviewing teachers and children in the school setting. Observations in classrooms aimed to identify children's performance and language(s) usage in different academic and social settings and its perception by the teacher; f) doing one follow-up phone call with mothers in the middle of the school year to go through previous concerns, identify new ones, and assess academic performance and language(s) changes. Mediators filled out specific forms[4] and took complementary

2 The H-SCP was founded in 1994 by Dr. Martha Julia García-Sellers and run until 2006. It was the result of a collaboration with different school districts in the Boston area, as well as with Latin America, Kuwait, and Jordan. The program was funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Massachusetts Department of Education. The qualitative data collected for this study is from 2003.

3 Because of work schedules, the fathers of the four children were not present for the home visits and seldom participated in school activities. However, they were not absent and were involved in their children's rearing and lives. When required, Leonard's father went to parent–teacher meeting.

4 All forms were designed by García-Sellers in 1997 and revised by Marchesseault in 2001 and Shapiro in 2002. The Spanish version of the forms can be found in Parra Velasco and García-Sellers (2005).

Table 1: Timeline for data collection.

September	November	January	March	April	June
First home visit	Child classroom observation	Language picture naming and interview with child	Phone follow-up	Teacher interview	Second home visit

notes during the home visits, interviews, or classroom observations. There were regular meetings with the director of the program and research team to discuss and decide further steps for each child participating in the program. A final report was written at the end of the school year with recommendations for both parents and teachers, for the summer and the following academic year.[5]

The first home visit and classroom observation allowed mediators to identify the initial adaptation pattern for each child and, when necessary, determine the strategies to follow throughout the school year to facilitate progress towards the adapted with support pattern. Children's changes in language preference and proficiency in Spanish were assessed in each interview with mothers and teachers and through a picture-naming test. Cross-referencing information from the interviews with the mother, child, and teacher allowed mediators to have a more integrated perspective of each child's school adaptation process, Spanish repertoire development, academic performance, and English learning.

In what follows, we will describe the home–school ecologies of four Latino children (three boys and one girl) who were part of the H-SCP. The four were about to enter kindergarten in the same school. The descriptions follow the order of the data collection timeline throughout the school year, as presented in Table 1. All interactions between mediator and mothers were in Spanish.

4 Case studies

Santos was a quiet, shy, and healthy five-year-old boy. He was born in the United States, but soon after, his parents, Elisa and Raúl, went back to El Salvador for three years. They returned to the United States with no plans to return to El Salvador. Elisa attended elementary school in El Salvador until second grade, and Raúl had no formal education. They both had jobs that required no literacy in Spanish or English. Elisa said they were reasonably satisfied with their lives in the United States. They shared their household with extended family and communicated in Spanish. Elisa

5 Data gathered in these forms were coded for statistical analysis of school adaptation trends.

expected Santos to learn English soon and speak both languages. However, Elisa said that Santos was "too shy to speak English at the time". She expected Santos to go to college and become "somebody". Santos and the mediator interacted in Spanish while doing several activities to assess school readiness.

Krissia was a healthy, active, and talkative five-year-old girl who was prone to bad colds and ear infections. She was born in the United States and lived with her mother, Norma, from Honduras, her father, Roberto, from El Salvador, and her 10-year-old sister. Norma finished middle school in Honduras and worked as a paraprofessional at an elementary school. When she moved to the United States, she completed her GED and opened a daycare center in the basement of their home (the family owned the house). Roberto worked in landscaping. Norma reported being very satisfied with their lives and was planning to stay in the United States. Both Norma and Roberto spoke English; however, they spoke Spanish to their children. The children spoke Spanish to the adults and both Spanish and English to each other. Krissia's mother expected her children to speak Spanish when they grew up and had high academic expectations for her (i.e. attend college and become independent). Krissia and the mediator interacted in Spanish.

Leonard was a healthy, quiet six-year-old boy. He was born in Peru and lived with his mother, Raquel, his father, Leonardo, his sister Kelly (10), and a baby brother. They lived in one room within a house with five other families. Despite being college-educated, Raquel and Leonardo had to leave Peru for economic reasons. They came to the United States first, leaving behind their two children with their grandmother and an aunt. A year later, they brought both children to the United States, but Leonard and Kelly were very attached to their relatives and did not want to leave Peru. Once in the United States, they first arrived in California. Subsequently, the family moved three times (coast to coast) in over a year and a half, which was very difficult for the children, especially Leonard. Raquel said they were satisfied with their lives and were looking forward to moving to a larger place. Raquel and her husband and other adults in the household spoke Spanish to their children, and the children spoke English among themselves. When asked about expectations for Leonard's future, Raquel said: "Whatever he wants to be, I will support him". The mediator and Leonard interacted in Spanish.

Bryan was an active and healthy six-year-old boy. Both his mother, Lilian, and his father, Carlos, were from Honduras, where Bryan was also born. Bryan arrived in the United States when he was two years old. Bryan also had a one-year-old brother. Lilian had a bachelor's degree in accounting but never worked, and Carlos finished high school and enrolled in the navy in Honduras. Carlos worked in a lab making special equipment, and Lilian stayed home to take care of the baby. Since their arrival in the United States, they have lived with relatives. Overall, they were satisfied with their lives in the United States. The adults spoke Spanish to their children, but Lilian said the

children used more English. Speaking Spanish and English at home was not a problem for her. She expected Bryan to continue speaking Spanish, and she wanted Bryan to go to college. The mediator and Bryan spoke in Spanish, but Lilian encouraged Bryan to answer the mediator's questions in English if he needed to.

To summarize, all mothers were satisfied with their lives in the United States. All four were socializing their children in Spanish. Three of them mentioned having college expectations for their children. Leonard's mother was less specific but supportive. At the same time, their home ecologies were different in housing situation, parental occupation, and language usage: Santos was the only one living in a "Spanish only" household. Krissia, Leonard, and Bryan were already using English with older siblings, cousins, and other relatives. Their mothers were not concerned about it and still expected their children to maintain Spanish while learning English.

4.1 Previous school experience and mothers' involvement

All four children already had some prekindergarten experience. Santos and Krissia attended the Head Start program;[6] Bryan, the SMILE program;[7] and Leonard had attended pre-K in Peru, a mainstream English kindergarten in California, and now was repeating this grade in Massachusetts.

Santos, Krissia, and Leonard enrolled in the Transitional Bilingual (TB) program offered at their neighborhood school for different reasons:[8] the program was recommended to Santos and Leonard; Krissia's mother requested it. Bryan's mother requested the regular English program because she was not convinced about the quality of the bilingual program. Although Santos and Leonard were recommended to the same program, they ended up with different teachers: Santos with Ms. Díaz (a Spanish speaker from Puerto Rico) and Leonard with Ms. Peterson (an English speaker but trained as a bilingual teacher). Krissia was also with Ms. Peterson. However, in the middle of the school year, Ms. Peterson retired unexpectedly, and Leonard and Krissia transferred to Ms. Díaz's classroom. Hence, Santos, Krissia, and Leonard ended the school year in the same classroom. The four mothers were interested in participating in school activities and felt responsible for communicating with the teacher. They wanted to be notified of any academic or behavioral

6 Head Start (https://www.mass.gov/head-start) is a federal program that offers early education, care programs, and services for low-income families. It promotes school readiness in children under age five through comprehensive education, health, and social services.

7 SMILE was a free pre-school program for all students.

8 In order to enroll in any public school program in the city where the four children lived, families needed to go to the Family Center (FC). FC staff made recommendations to families about which program could best suit their children's needs.

problems with their children. The mothers were asked if they had noticed any changes in Spanish use as a result of the pre-K experience. Santos' mother was the only one who reported no change in Santos' Spanish. The other three mothers reported increased use of English.

4.2 Adaptation to school and languages use

Santos was comfortable and happy in the classroom, working independently and with classmates. He followed the teacher's instructions, transitioned well between activities, participated, answered questions, and accomplished all the work. Santos' interactions with Ms. Diaz and his peers were consistent in Spanish. He also answered all interview questions in Spanish by choice. He reported that he spoke Spanish at home and read in Spanish. He mentioned that he spoke English only with an uncle. In the Language Picture Naming test, Santos showed both preference for and higher proficiency in Spanish.

Like Santos, Krissia worked well independently and with other children, and she participated and answered questions asked by the class. She seemed happy, followed Ms. Peterson's instructions, and transitioned well between activities, although she often sought the teacher's attention. Krissia spoke Spanish with her peers and spoke both Spanish and English with her teacher. At the same time, Ms. Peterson spoke Spanish and English when addressing the whole class, but only Spanish to Krissia. Krissia's interview was consistently conducted in Spanish by her choice, although she stated that she spoke both Spanish and English. She also mentioned that she spoke Spanish with her teacher and liked to speak Spanish and English with other children (this statement was not aligned with the mediator's observations but with the teacher's report). The LPN showed that Krissia preferred Spanish although she had about the same proficiency in Spanish and English.

Leonard transitioned well between activities and complied with Ms. Peterson's instructions, although he often worked alone. He did not respond to his peers' presence or feedback, and other children rejected him when he tried to integrate into group activities. He seemed lonely, and Ms. Peterson often had to intervene to solve tensions between Leonard and his peers over interactions or toys. Leonard tended to stay in the classroom and work longer. He was recognized for his creative and mechanical abilities, but the teacher and mediator noted that he was often tired and bored. Although he spoke Spanish and English, it was difficult to understand him in regular interactions. He hardly talked. Leonard's interview was conducted in Spanish by his choice, but he acknowledged that he also spoke English. He said he spoke Spanish and English with peers, his teacher, and at home. Leonard's LPN showed a preference for and higher proficiency in Spanish than in English.

Bryan worked independently and played with other children, although he didn't seem to have a close relationship with them. He could initiate interactions, seek the teacher's attention, and ask for help when needed. The mediator observed that Bryan was happy and comfortable in classroom activities and transitioning well between activities. However, the teacher (Ms. Lynch) had already expressed concerns about Bryan's ability to stay focused and his need for direction. He showed some academic difficulties with expressive language, reading, and math in English. The teacher's reactions varied: on the one hand, she would chastise him for being the last to finish a worksheet; on the other hand, she would praise him for his good work and effort. During the interview, Bryan recognized that he spoke Spanish and English, but his interview was conducted in English by his choice. He also said he spoke Spanish and English with his friends and English with his teacher. His LPN test showed that Bryan preferred English, although he had about the same proficiency in both languages.

4.3 Follow-up with mothers and interview with teachers

Santos' mother reported that he was doing very well in school and enjoying learning about letters and numbers. She noted that he was improving his Spanish, which he still preferred, and he was learning some words in English. However, she said he did not want to speak English with other children in his classroom. Ms. Díaz also reported that Santos was making much progress, doing very well, and getting good grades. Mother and teacher had met several times during pick-up and drop-off at school.

Krissia's mother said that Krissia was sad because she loved Ms. Peterson and that Ms. Díaz reprimanded her because she was very talkative and easily distracted. Krissia's mother expressed surprise about her progress in learning letters, syllables, and how to form words. She was also learning numbers and addition. The mother reported improvement in Krissia's Spanish when talking to her and her father. She also mentioned that Krissia was learning a lot of English and that she only spoke English with her sister and cousins. She highlighted the fact that Krissia was translating a lot. Ms. Diaz, now Krissia's teacher, reported that Krissia was a good girl but was concerned about her attention in class. She spoke to Krissia in Spanish, and the girl also spoke Spanish during class activities and at lunch and recess. The teacher had met Krissia's parents about academic concerns at least twice.

Leonard's mother said he was doing fine in school but did not talk much about academics or friends. She shared, however, that Leonard was happier with Ms. Díaz. Leonard and his parents found Ms. Peterson very strict with children. The mother noted Leonard's difficulties with expressive language, but she reported that he communicated better in English than in Spanish. Contrary to the LPN results and the

mediator's observations, Leonard's mother thought English was his preferred language or at least the language he seemed to be learning more. His mother felt somewhat disappointed with the bilingual program. The mother was also concerned about Leonard's difficulty distinguishing letters from numbers. Both parents felt that he could learn more, but that was not happening. However, they had not communicated yet with the teacher. Finally, the mother expressed concern about Leonard becoming more aggressive, perhaps influenced by a friend or because he was also jealous of his new baby brother. She remarked on Leonard's difficult temperament.

Interestingly, Ms. Díaz reported that Leonard was not disruptive, did not fight, and was not withdrawing. She pointed out that she spoke Spanish to Leonard, and he also used this language to communicate with her and his peers. Like Leonard's mother, she was concerned about his academic performance. By March, they agreed to do a child study evaluation. Ms. Díaz and the mediator decided to meet with his parents and suggested a plan to support Leonard: his strengths and creative abilities would be highlighted in school. The mediator worked one on one with Leonard in writing and math, and the teacher agreed to meet with his first-grade teacher to explain Leonard's situation. The mediator provided information about sports and recreational activities his parents could do with him. At the end of the school year, these actions seemed to improve Leonard's mood and disposition in the classroom. However, academic concerns did not go away.

The follow-up with Bryan's mother was also necessary because at the beginning of the school year, Bryan's case was brought to a special meeting with the teacher, mother, and a team of specialists. His teacher thought he needed help with English and managing anxiety in the classroom. The teacher thought this was because the parents were not establishing enough limits for Bryan. This attitude created some tension between her and Bryan's mother. He was assigned to receive support in English and counseling for general educational issues and adjustment. Fortunately, during the phone follow-up, Bryan's mother reported that he was doing much better. The teacher also said that his behavior had improved. She mentioned that Bryan seemed happier and that everything was going very well. However, academics were still a concern. The mother said that Bryan preferred English.

4.4 Second home visit

During the second home visit, Santos was more self-confident, open, and expressive than the first one. His mother was very pleased and proud of him. She reported that Santos still preferred Spanish and his language skills were getting stronger. At the same time, he seemed more comfortable speaking English with other children and people in the street. However, his mother noted that he would not speak English in

front of her. Although hard to interpret, this could signal some sense of Santos' linguistic consideration or loyalty towards his mother, who did not speak English. The mediator also noted that Santos was more fluent in English during the activities they did together. The mother stayed in continuous communication with Santos' teacher throughout the school year. At the end of the year, Ms. Díaz rated him as one of the three top students in her class with the highest grade (Satisfactorio/Satisfactory) in all Language Arts Standards, Math, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development, and Creative Arts. There were no concerns about Santos' transition into the first year of the regular English program. The only suggestion for the summer was to keep practicing reading and writing.

The mediator did not observe any significant difference between the first and second home visits regarding Krissia's behavior. In terms of language usage, according to Krissia's mother, she had improved her Spanish and also kept learning English, which she continued to prefer to communicate with her older sister and to continue to translate with frequency. Mediator and child communicated in Spanish. Through the school year, Krissia's mother communicated with Ms. Díaz about academic concerns derived from Krissia's continuous absences due to colds and ear infections. At the end of the school year, Krissia's grades were "Improvement needed" for Language Arts standards and "Satisfactory" in Math, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development, and Creative Arts standards. She was in the middle third of her class. The mediator and mother talked about the new and higher demands that the first grade would present. Krissia's mother was concerned about this, but she already knew the first-grade teacher and trusted she would help Krissia. She was planning to send the girl to summer school for two weeks.

The mediator noticed a significant change in Leonard's mood between the first and second home visits: he was much more serious and seemed sad in the first one. In the second one, he was more expressive and relaxed. It appeared that changing teachers had helped him in this regard. The mediator noticed some tensions between Leonard and his mother when doing some activities together, especially in the reading task that Leonard found difficult. However, tensions faded once the mother got involved and read the book with Leonard. He used Spanish and English to communicate with the mediator throughout the visit. The teacher continued to be concerned about Leonard's academic performance, difficulty distinguishing between letters and numbers, language, tiredness, and some aggressive behavior. At the end of the school year, he was rated at the bottom third of the class. His report card showed that he needed meetings with teachers and parents to find ways to support him in all areas. The areas graded as "Satisfactory" were Physical Development and Creative Arts.

No particular differences were observed in Bryan's behavior between the first and second home visits. Both times he was friendly and engaged in activities. However, the mediator noticed that he became more active with challenging

activities, mainly reading and writing. His need for attention and redirection was related to the difficulty in solving specific tasks. Regarding languages, Bryan preferred and was more proficient in English than Spanish. Bryan and the mediator also spoke in English during the activities.

Nonetheless, he still had strong comprehension in Spanish because he understood when his parents spoke to him in Spanish and still used a few words in Spanish. Reading and writing in English were his most significant challenges in school. At the end of the school year, the mother and teacher reached a respectful relationship. The teacher rated him at the bottom of the group despite Bryan's efforts and improvements in English.

5 Discussion

Analyzing the four cases we presented allows us to identify some trends that can shed some light on the dynamism of the home–school mesosystem and the factors behind the growth of the children's Spanish and English repertoires within the broader process of school adaptation (cf. Table 2).

The child that was able to transition most successfully from home to school, maintain and strengthen his Spanish repertoire while also learning English, and had the strongest academic performance with no concerns for the following academic year was Santos. His household was primarily Spanish-speaking. His teacher was also a Spanish speaker, and his mother and teacher connected well and often throughout the school year. They had a relationship of trust and mutual respect (Paulick et al. 2021). Their perceptions of Santos' language use and academic performance were aligned, and both were proud of his academic progress and growth in both languages. This home–school mesosystem provided Santos with the support he needed to grow on all fronts. Interestingly, of the four families analyzed here, Santos' parents had the lowest formal education and socioeconomic resources, which shows that having parents with lower SES and education is not necessarily a predictor of school failure in children.

Krissia's home was already bilingual by the time she started kindergarten. English was part of her daily life at home and her first schooling experience in the Head Start program. English was also present in Ms. Peterson's classroom. Krissia's knowledge of the two languages and her sociable and talkative personality interested her in translation, which could point to her awareness of the advantages of knowing Spanish and English equivalents (Otheguy 2020) to more easily engage with different interlocutors in different contexts. We could say that Krissia represented the adapted pattern; she seemed to have figured out how and when to use both languages to move easily between home and school environments. However, she was not navigating

Table 2: Overview of Spanish repertoire along with English and academic performance.

	Home language with adults/with children	Pre-K program/ language use	Kinder program	Academic concern/changes in languages use (mid academic year)	Language use at the end of the year	Academic performance at the end of the year
Santos	Spanish/Spanish	Head Start/ Spanish	Trans. Bilingual: recommended	No academic concern/Improving Spanish; some words in English	Strong Spanish; Using more English with peers	Top third
Krissia	Spanish/Spanish-English	Head start/ Spanish-English	Trans. Bilingual: requested	Some concern/progress in Spanish; only English with siblings; more translation	Improving Spanish; preferred English with siblings	Middle third
Leonard	Spanish/English	Regular English/ Spanish-English	Trans. Bilingual: recommended	Concern/prefers English; no progress in Spanish	English and Spanish (difficulty in expressive language)	Third bottom
Bryan	Spanish/English	SMILE/Spanish-English	English Regular: requested	Concern/Improvement in both but prefers English	English preference and proficiency; Spanish comprehension	Third bottom

school challenges alone. Her mother strove to align with both of Krissia's teachers in matters of discipline and academic concerns and had good communication, especially with Ms. Díaz, giving Krissia another level of support. The fact that her mother knew the first-grade teacher and was planning to talk to her was essential to building continuity between kindergarten and first grade.

Leonard and Bryan had more difficulty with transitions and school adaptation. Although for different reasons, both were situated in the non-adapted pattern at the beginning of the year. Even when English was already part of their daily lives – something that could have helped their transitions to school – the transition brought significant levels of anxiety to both boys: for Leonard, due to challenging life circumstances and continuous transitions and changes at home, and for Bryan due to the challenges of being in a classroom where he struggled with the language. Both needed evaluations and extra support from school and their teachers and mothers. Their mothers struggled to connect with their children's teachers, and Leonard's was disappointed with the bilingual program. Moreover, it is important to point out that in Leonard's case, a challenge was the misalignment of the mother's, teacher's, and mediator's perceptions of the boy's language use and behavior. The role of the mediator was key in bringing all parties together to align such perceptions as much as possible and in identifying common goals for parents and teachers to support Leonard in the second part of the academic year. In Bryan's case, the teacher's comments in the interview with the mediator showed that she assumed that Bryan's issues were home-related (according to her, his parents needed to set more limits at home), which created an uncomfortable and unproductive situation with the mother, not uncommon in multilingual settings where power dynamics play an important role (Ochs and Schieffelin 2011; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). In both cases, the mediator, parents, and teachers could come together to identify strategies to support the boys, and progress in adaptation was made. However, both teachers had concerns for the following year. We could say that the children identified at the beginning of the school year within the non-adapted pattern had more difficulty transitioning and had greater academic challenges throughout the year (García-Sellers 1996).

6 Final remarks and recommendations

The data presented in this chapter aim to offer an integrated perspective on Spanish use within the school adaptation process and along with English learning in four young Latino children transitioning into kindergarten. Such a perspective allowed us to identify possible trends and patterns that show that the ecology that supported Spanish growth, English learning, and academic success (Santo's) had the following characteristics: a bilingual program was available in the community; there were

stable and dignified living conditions for the child; the household was Spanish-speaking;[9] parents believed in the benefits of bilingual education; the teacher was also Spanish-speaking from a Spanish-speaking country with cultural patterns of interaction similar to those known by the child; there was good, respectful, and continuous communication between mother and teacher; the expectations and perceptions the adults had of the child's behavior were aligned; they valued, acknowledged, and praised the child's language use, behavior, and academic accomplishments. The child was healthy and did not suffer from anxiety.

In Santo's story of success, along with the case of Krissia and, to some extent, Leonard's and Bryan's, after all, parents and teachers came together to support the children, despite their initial struggles. However, Latino children's stories of success continuously hang on a delicate balance, prone to become a story of ongoing academic, linguistic, and emotional struggle, given the socio-economic and educational challenges that most Latino families face in this country. Children's ecologies portrayed in this work – particularly Santos' – are the exception instead of the rule. First, even before the pandemic, around two-thirds (62%) of Latino children in the United States lived in or near poverty (Wildsmith et al. 2016). The Covid-19 pandemic has had, as Vargas and Sanchez (2020) state, a devastating impact on the economic well-being of Latino families, putting their well-being, education, and lives at constant risk. Given the demands of working long hours or several jobs, many parents struggle to find the time to support their children at home or to connect with teachers and be involved in school activities.

Second, Latino households are becoming bilingual (López et al. 2018). As we saw in the data, in three out of four families, English was already part of children's life (older siblings and cousins were important players in this regard); by the end of the school year, Santos also mentioned he was speaking English with one of his uncles. Latino communities are changing their Spanish repertoires through emergent uses derived from their use of English and their interactions with other Spanish speakers, even if in uneven patterns (Moreno-Fernandez 2018) and even when they are not fully socialized (Otheguy 2020). As Ochs and Schieffelin (2011: 14) point out, "children's linguistic and cultural production is influenced by [community linguistic] transformation, and children themselves contribute to this transformation". This linguistic dynamism is already raising essential questions about the intergenerational continuity of Spanish and its meaning for young Latino identities (Valdés 2015).

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9 There is extensive research on the importance of quantity and quality of parental linguistic input for child language development. See Escobar and Tamis-LeMonda (2017) and García and Jensen (2009) for a summary of other factors at the microsystem level that impact child's vocabulary development variability.

This linguistic richness could be leveraged through accessible, equitable, and high-quality bilingual programs. Such programs could be the basis for engaging Latino students of all ages with creative ways of acquiring Spanish literacy skills and accessing grade-level content (López 2012; Valentino and Reardon 2015). But this would require addressing the lack of programs and professional development to make this happen. Bilingual teachers need continuous opportunities and new frameworks to question the old theoretical "apparatus" based on structural and monoglossic perspectives of bilingualism (García 2014; García and Alonso 2021; Valdés 2022). They need support in embracing new pedagogies, such as translanguaging (García and Li 2014; Prada 2021),[10] critical pedagogy, and multiliteracies that are proven effective in working with bilingual children and youth at the linguistic and academic level (i.e. Carreira 2007; Parra Velasco 2021). Maybe under such new frameworks, the Leonards in our schools would be allowed to be perceived as translanguaging users instead of being assessed through monolingual standards and perceived as having difficulty with their expressive language. With more bilingual after-school opportunities, many families like Bryans' may feel confident and motivated to enroll their children in these activities to strengthen and expand their Spanish repertoire without compromising their child's English learning process.

Third, the analysis showed that Latino/bilingual teachers are a critical factor in the success of Latino children. Miss Díaz made a difference for Santos, Leonard, and Krissia. Therefore, addressing the massive shortage of [Latino] bilingual teachers (Gándara and Mordechay 2017) is imperative. The availability of Latino teachers is essential for girls like Krissia, as Gándara et al. (2013) found that Latinas are more likely to go to college if they have a Latino/a teacher as a role model. Moreover, as Paulick et al. (2021: 307) propose, it is imperative to support teachers in regular English programs – like Bryan's teacher – to broaden their responsibility focus and become culturally competent individuals and asset-framed pedagogues, leaving aside deficient and biased beliefs about Latino families.

In sum, programs to support Latino families from an ecological perspective is an urgent need as more families of immigrant backgrounds rely on preschools[11] (Karoly and Gonzalez 2011) and the Latino population increases in places where there is little infrastructure to support their educational needs (Gándara and Mordechay 2017). In particular, Nieto and Yoshikawa (2013) and Paulick et al. (2021) propose that programs for Latino families – or any family with immigrant background for that

10 The work in this area is vast. A good example of translanguaging pedagogy for teaching content in elementary and middle school is the Initiative CUNY-NYS for emergent bilinguals: https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/). See Prada (2021) for a translanguaging framework for Spanish classes for Latino students.

11 It is now acknowledged that the first five years of a child's life are paramount for their future development and academic achievement (Siddiqi et al. 2011).

matter – should be developed at the mesosystemic level, like the H-SCP, in order to target the potential of the interactions between proximal settings.[12] Ideally, such integral programs would include: some component or form of bilingual education with a strong presence of Latino educators; access to continuous professional development for bilingual teachers and professional development for main-stream teachers working with Latino families (or families of any immigrant background); and bilingual mediators or family liaisons that facilitate parental school engagement opportunities.

Research has shown that strong connections with Spanish leads to positive ethnic bilingual identities in Latino children that, in turn, foster academic achievement (Brown and Chu 2012; García-Sellers 1996; Marks et al. 2013) including high school completion (Carreira 2007) and college enrollment (Prada and Pascual y Cabo 2022). At the same time, a strong ethnic identity is also a key factor in the continued home language development (Lee 2002, cf. He 2011) that, in turn, will ensure trans-generational communication and the strengthening of the ties Latino children develop with their communities of origin and those in the U.S. Therefore, fostering ecologies that support Spanish use, beginning with the youngest members, can only bring positive outcomes.

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12 Nieto and Yoshikawa (2013: 91) propose examples of initiatives from the fields of family and community engagement in education, poverty reduction, and political incorporation. Some examples are events to increase parent involvement in schools, hiring family liaisons and bilingual staff, home visits by teachers, facilitating relationships and social networks among immigrant parents in and outside schools, and offering parents English classes, among other programs that are outside the scope of this work. On the other hand, Paulick et al. (2021: 308) propose three concrete strategies for collaborating with what they call culturally and linguistically marginalized families at the transition to schooling: home visiting, parent–teacher conferences, and ongoing contact. Finally, Terriquez (2013) suggests specific programs for Latino fathers to provide information on the different ways in which they could broaden their range of involvement with their children, thereby adding to the benefits of partnership with families.

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