

## **Parents' use of discourse strategies in dual-lingual interactions with receptive bilingual children**

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### **Introduction**

The burgeoning body of research focusing on bilingual children's language production gives the impression that children who receive bilingual exposure naturally speak both of their languages. However, some bilingual children only produce one of the two languages that they understand. This phenomenon is more common than one expects. In an extensive survey in the Netherlands, De Houwer (2007) found that a quarter of children who were exposed to another language in the home only spoke Dutch. Likewise, survey studies in Japan have shown that roughly one in three English-Japanese bilingual children spoke only Japanese (Billings, 1990; Noguchi, 2001; Yamamoto, 2001). These numbers may be even higher, given the fact that parents who were keener on bilingualism were likely to have participated in those surveys (Billings, 1990). When parents speak one language, and children use another language, parent-child interactions become dual-lingual. This paper focuses on Max and Nina, two bilingual children in Japan who mainly used Japanese to their Italian-speaking and English-speaking fathers respectively, and specifically examines how parental use of discourse strategies affect parent-child interactions and the children's degree of bilingualism.

### ***Receptive bilingualism in children***

A receptive bilingual is a person who 'understands a second language, in either its spoken or written form, or both, but does not necessarily speak or write it' (Baetens Beardsmore, 1982:13). Receptive bilingualism is also known as passive bilingualism, but the term has been criticized due to arguments that language decoding involves neurological processes that are hardly passive (Baetens Beardsmore, 1982). For children who receive bilingual exposure in a family setting, receptive bilingualism would refer to the production of one language despite the comprehension of two. Nevertheless, does receptive bilingualism imply zero production of the weaker language? If children are consistently receiving input at home over a prolonged period, it is hard to envisage that they do not produce their weaker language at all. Receptive bilinguals can probably produce some minimal words or phrases in that language when interacting with their caregivers, for example, polar responses to yes-no questions (Slavkov, 2015). In Döpke's (1992) study, three German-English receptive bilingual children spoke some German, but it made up less than 10 percent of their speech to their German-speaking parents. Likewise, whereas the English-Gaelic bilingual child in Smith-Christmas (2016) spoke English most of the time, he used Gaelic selectively to request for something, gain attention, or to mitigate an admonishment. Quay (2012)

also considered the minimal production of English and German by a Japanese-English-German trilingual child as receptive trilingualism.

The input environment has a direct bearing on bilingual children's degree of bilingualism. Some active bilingual children may stop speaking their weaker language when input factors change drastically in favor of their stronger (and usually societal) language, i.e., when they begin daycare (Slavkov, 2015) or elementary school (Uribe de Kellett, 2002). Differences in the input environment between siblings in the same family also make receptive bilingualism a potentially more common occurrence among younger children. In Japan, there is a higher percentage of receptive bilingualism in later-born children compared to firstborns and only children in English-Japanese bilingual families (Noguchi, 2001). The younger siblings of the English-German bilingual children in Döpke (1992) were also receptive bilinguals or English monolinguals. Later-born children potentially receive less exposure to their weaker language than first-born children because their older siblings tend to speak the stronger language to them and socialize their parents into using more of it (Bridges & Hoff, 2014; Kopeliovich, 2013; Tuominen, 1999).

Receptive bilingualism may arise when children grow up in environments where their parents did not care what language the child spoke because both are understood (De Houwer, 2006). However, it occurs even when parents put their most concerted effort into bilingual childrearing. Neither parents' consistency in language use (Döpke, 1992; Mishina-Mori, 2011) or involvement in child-centered activities such as book-reading (Smith-Christmas, 2016) guarantee active bilingualism. Moreover, children may not speak the language, even if they are learning to read and write in it (Smith Christmas, 2016).

Receptive bilingual children can become active bilinguals when their language environment changes. Their weaker language may be reactivated in a matter of days, as demonstrated by Slavkov's (2015) study of Sophie, an English-Bulgarian child aged 2;3. Sophie's Bulgarian utterances only made up 1% of her speech before a 10-day trip to Bulgaria but increased to almost 100% by Day 7 of her stay. Bulgarian utterances not only made up most of her speech, but they were also longer and more complex. The reactivation of Bulgarian was not difficult for Sophie, possibly because she had only been passive for only seven months before visiting Bulgaria. After this trip, the child successfully maintained an active command of Bulgarian. There are also reports of language recovery in other bilingual children. English re-emerged in a Hebrew-English bilingual child (age 3;3) after he spent four weeks in a Canadian English camp (Karniol, 1992). Language recovery was also documented in an older child. Uribe de Kellett's (2002) second child, Ana Sophia, was an active English-Spanish bilingual until she stopped speaking Spanish in elementary school. However, her Spanish was reactivated when they returned to Colombia for a six-week visit. While only a third of Ana-Sophia's utterances were Spanish in her first two days in Colombia, they made up 91.4% and 100% of her utterances by Days 17 and 28 of her stay.

These results indicate the possibility of language recovery for receptive bilingual children who were initially producing both of their languages. However, some bilingual children may only speak one of their languages at the early stages of language development and remain this way. While language activation by bilingual children who have only displayed receptive skills from the onset of speech is yet undocumented in

bilingual research, it may be more challenging than language recovery due to the long period of language inactivity. Nevertheless, whichever the circumstance, the potentiality of active bilingualism at a later age is arguably sufficient ground for parents of receptive bilingual children to continue providing input in the weaker language.

### ***The role of parental discourse strategies in bilingual acquisition***

Discourse strategies are conversation patterns that convey parents' wishes and expectations regarding language choice (De Houwer, 2009). While termed as 'strategies', they may not always be used consciously by parents (Lanza, 2004). Some discourse strategies are used explicitly to request weaker language production, but others are less deliberate. Döpke (1992) introduced 'insisting strategies' that impose varying degrees of constraint on the child. High-constraint strategies demanded content responses, whereas low-constraint ones required polar responses or no response. While Döpke (1992) focused on the constraint of the discourse strategy on the child, Lanza (2004) examined the extent to which they negotiate a monolingual context, i.e., the exclusive use of a parent's language, or a bilingual context, i.e., the use of two languages in interaction. Both Döpke's (1992) and Lanza's (2004) discourse strategies overlap and are used in this study.

**Table 11.1 Parents' discourse strategies (Döpke, 1992; Lanza, 2004)**

Type of strategy	Context	Constraint
Instruction to translate	Monolingual	High
Minimal grasp		
Expressed guess		
Adult repetition		
Move-on		
Code-switching	Bilingual	Low

As Table 11.1 illustrates, the strategy that places the highest constraint on the child is an 'instruction to translate' (Döpke, 1992). A parent may say *what does Daddy say?* to request for the reproduction of an utterance in the appropriate language. Other high-constraint strategies that negotiate a monolingual context are the 'minimal grasp' and 'expressed guess' strategies. The 'minimal grasp' strategy involves feigning non-comprehension to compel the child to use the weaker language (e.g., *what?* or *hmm?*). In using the 'expressed guess' strategy, the parent guesses the child's preceding utterance (e.g., *do you want juice?*). 'Adult repetition' strategy is a less restrictive strategy where the correct language form is modeled for the child (e.g., *I want juice*). In the low-constraint 'move-on' strategy, the parent simply continues with the conversation. Finally, in the 'codeswitching' strategy, the parent switches to the child's language.

The 'instruction to translate', 'minimal grasp' and 'expressed guess' strategies are termed as 'constraining' strategies because the child's utterance is queried, and a response is required (Chevalier, 2015). Contrastively, the 'move-on' and 'code-switching' strategies are 'non-constraining', because a response is unnecessary. An 'adult' repetition' strategy can be constraining or otherwise. This strategy imposes a constraint on the child if the parent highlights the language choice as a problem and expects a response. However, in an 'incorporated adult repetition' strategy, the parent continues with the conversation after modeling the language. Therefore, this particular

type of 'adult repetition' strategy functions somewhat like the 'move-on' strategy, because the child does not need to attend to his choice of language.

Parents of active bilingual children tend to make use of 'constraining' strategies to negotiate a monolingual context. The parents' language is conveyed to the child as the appropriate language to use. Active bilingualism in Siri, the Norwegian-English subject in Lanza (2004), and in Keith and Fiona, the English-German bilingual subjects in Döpke (1992), was attributed to their parents' use of the 'instruction to translate' and 'minimal grasp' strategies. Contrastively, parents whose children produce little of their weaker language tend to use 'non-constraining' discourse strategies, which create a bilingual context where language mixing is permissible. The frequent use of the 'move-on' and 'code-switching' strategies by the Japanese mothers of the English-Japanese bilingual subjects in Kasuya (1998) and Mishina-Mori (2011) did not encourage the children's use of Japanese. Corroborative evidence was also found in trilingual acquisition studies. The use of the 'instruction to translate' and the 'adult repetition' strategies by the English-speaking aunt of Chevalier's (2015) Swiss German-French-English subject, Lina, contributed to the child's greater production of English. However, the frequent use of the 'move-on' strategy by Lina's French-speaking father did not promote her production of French. A change in the use of discourse strategies can positively affect language production. In Juan-Garau and Pérez-Vidal (2001), a high level of mixing by Andreau, a Catalan-English bilingual child, was attributed to his English-speaking father's tendency to use the 'move-on' strategy. However, when the father began using the 'minimal grasp' strategy more frequently, the child spoke more English.

Nevertheless, children also play an active role in their bilingualism (Said & Zhu, 2017; Tuominen, 1999). The use of discourse strategies may not influence the children's linguistic outcome as much as parents may like, because the language context is mutually constructed by parents and children in interaction. Slavkov (2015) described how his English-Bulgarian subject countered her Bulgarian-speaking father's discourse strategies by ignoring his requests for translation, moving on with the conversation, declining invitations to switch languages, and displaying negative emotions whenever discourse strategies were used. These counter-strategies left her father with little choice than to persist with the low-constraint 'adult repetition' strategy, and even start using the 'move-on' strategy. 'Constraining' discourse strategies also cannot promote language production in bilingual children who do not have adequate linguistic ability to respond (Mishina-Mori, 2011). Moreover, while younger children may be more compliant, older children may not feel obliged to respond, particularly if they are aware that they are understood by their parents. As De Houwer (2006) noted, receptive bilingual children generally do fine communicatively, so there may be little incentive for them to switch to their weaker language when requested by their parents. Being accustomed to using their stronger language, they may even use it even when they know the equivalent forms in their weaker language. Furthermore, even when the bilingual child is responsive to 'contrasting' strategies, overall language production may not be affected. One of Kasuya's (1998) Japanese-English bilingual subjects, Ray, spoke Japanese whenever his Japanese parent used 'constraining' strategies but produced the least Japanese among her four subjects.

Overuse of high-constraint strategies also hinders conversation flows and creates breakdowns in communication (Lanza, 2004). Cumulatively, the excessive use of 'constraining' strategies may cause communication problems, or worse, even make the

child reject the language altogether. Moreover, parents may not always be aware of the discourse strategies that they use (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013). Even when parents know that discourse strategies are important for promoting the use of the weaker language, it may be difficult to put them into practice, particularly during busy times of the day or week (e.g., getting ready for school) and in more complex situations (e.g., talking about problems at school). The use of discourse strategies is also a reflection of the parents' interactional style, or in broader terms, their approach to parenting, which they may be unable or reluctant to change. Döpke (1992) noted how the mother of one of her subjects used only low-constraint strategies, because she was afraid of jeopardizing her relationship with the child. Therefore, parents who have specific views about how they should interact with the child may find it difficult to use 'constraining' discourse strategies.

### ***Dual-lingual parent-child interactions***

Saville-Troike (1987) described the use of different languages by speakers who have receptive abilities in each other's spoken languages as 'dual-lingual' interaction. Dual-lingual interaction is unlike 'bilingual' interaction, where both speakers are equally adept at speaking two languages and alternate between them in conversation. It also differs from 'dilingual' interaction, which is the use of different languages by speakers who do not understand each other. Therefore, when bilingual children comprehend but do not speak their parent's language, both parties engage in dual-lingual interaction. In the family, dual-lingual interaction has also been described as a 'parallel' mode of communication that reflects the caregiver's 'maintenance-oriented' (Garafanga, 2010) or 'stand-your-ground' (Smith-Christmas, 2016) approach to the child's receptive bilingualism. In Smith-Christmas' (2016) study, a grandmother continued speaking Gaelic to her English-speaking grandson, even when he requested her to speak English or did not understand what she said. The grandmother felt that her input was necessary to develop his Gaelic, but the child did not speak much of the language despite her persistence.

De Houwer (2015) argued that dual-lingual conversations are potentially problematic. The refusal of both parent and child to use a common language reflects 'frustrated' or 'conflictive' bilingual development, as opposed to 'harmonious' bilingual development where the acquisition and use of two languages are positive experiences for the family. Parents who invest a lot of time and effort in bilingual parenting inevitably expect their children to speak both of their languages. However, when their bilingual parenting goal is not realized, they probably experience a range of negative emotions, including guilt, failure, and embarrassment, which can threaten their socioemotional well-being (De Houwer, 2017). Furthermore, the continuous use of a language without child reciprocity requires more agency and effort, which inevitably causes frustration. In Smith-Christmas (2016), the Gaelic-speaking grandmother found it 'demoralizing' after some time that her grandchildren did not speak her language. Dual-lingual interactions also make it difficult for some family members to communicate with the child. Lina, the trilingual child in Chevalier (2015), was so accustomed to using Swiss-German to her French-speaking father that, during her French-speaking paternal grandmother's visits, she would also respond in Swiss-German to her, even though her grandmother could not comprehend the language.

Dual-lingual interactions have serious long-term implications when parent and child have limited comprehension of their weaker languages, and communication becomes more complex and non-contextual with age (e.g., discussing school matters). When there is a lack of understanding between parent and child, dual-lingual conversations may lead to dilingual or minimal communication. Wong-Fillmore (2000) described how relations deteriorated in a Chinese migrant family in San Francisco because the parents and grandmother understood little English, and their adolescent children understood little Chinese. Likewise, Tseng and Fuligni (2000) found a higher level of parent-child conflict in East Asian, Filipino and Latin American adolescents in the US who spoke English to their parents than those who spoke their parents' native languages. Moreover, children's persistent use of the societal language can make parents abandon their own language and cause a language shift as seen in how French-speaking children in Belgium prompted their Kinyarwanda-French bilingual parents to speak French through the use of 'medium requests' (Garafanga, 2010).

### **The present study**

Despite the commonality of receptive bilingualism, there is a paucity of research on language use by receptive bilingual children, and the interactions that they have with their parents. While many studies have examined parental use of discourse strategies with very young bilingual children, it remains unclear how parents interact with older bilingual children, i.e., age three and above, who show little production of their weaker language from the start. An investigation is necessary because parental discourse strategies may work differently on older children, given their ages and orientation towards dual-lingual interaction. This study contributes to our limited knowledge of receptive bilingualism in children by addressing the following research questions:

1. How do receptive bilingual children use their weaker language?
2. How does the parents' use of discourse strategies contribute towards the child's receptive bilingualism?
3. To what extent are 'constraining' discourse strategies effective in eliciting the production of the weaker language?

### **Method**

#### ***Participants***

A case study approach was adopted for this research, because the dual-lingual interactions that take place between receptive bilingual children and their parents could be studied intensively using rich and in-depth data. The participants of this study were Max and Nina (aged 7 and 4 respectively at the start of the study). They were the second children of two exogamous families who were acquaintances of the researcher. Both children were born and raised in Tokyo, Japan. They received bilingual exposure from birth in the One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL) setting. Max's Italian father spoke Italian to Max whereas Nina's American father spoke English to Nina. Max also received some Italian input in his weekend literacy classes. Both children's Japanese mothers spoke Japanese to them. According to Max's and Nina's fathers, both children did not produce much of their weaker language from the onset of speech. At the start of the study, they estimated that Max and Nina spoke 99% and 95% Japanese to them

respectively. Both fathers are long-term residents in Japan and have conversational ability in Japanese. Therefore, they were able to comprehend their children's Japanese utterances without much difficulty.

Both of Max's parents mainly communicated in Japanese with each other. Japanese was also the language used by Max and his parents to his older sister, who had physical and cognitive disabilities that affected her speech. Therefore, in Max's family, Italian was used only by the father to address Max. Compared to Max's family, Nina's family had more exposure to the minority language (English), because Nina's older sister was an active bilingual who spoke English to their father, and to a lesser extent, their mother. Nina's Japanese mother was a fluent English speaker, so Nina's parents spoke English to each other at home. However, interactions between Nina and her sister were predominantly in Japanese. Table 11.2 summarizes the languages used among family members.

**Table 11.2 Language use in the family**

	Max's family	Nina's family
Child → Father	Japanese	Japanese
Child ← Father	Italian	English
Child ⇔ Mother	Japanese	Japanese
Child ⇔ Sibling	Japanese	Japanese
Father ⇔ Mother	Japanese, some Italian	English
Father ⇔ Sibling	Japanese	English
Mother ⇔ Sibling	Japanese	Japanese, some English

Max and Nina also received exposure to their fathers' languages during trips to Italy or the US. Table 11.3 shows the number of trips the children had taken since birth and the duration of their stays. Max had visited Italy four times in the past three years. His shortest stay was nine days, and his longest stay was 17 days. The entire family usually visited Italy together, so Max was still exposed to Japanese through his Japanese-speaking mother. It was only during his last trip that he visited Italy exclusively with his father. Nina and her entire family had visited the US six times before this study started. They made bi-annual visits since the child was aged 2;5. However, their stays were quite short, i.e., mostly a week long. While Nina's Japanese mother and sister spoke Japanese to Nina, both of them were fluent in English and spoke English while in the US, so the child was possibly exposed to less Japanese during these trips.

**Table 11.3 Trips to the fathers' home country**

Max		Nina	
Age (year;month)	Duration (days)	Age (year;month)	Duration (days)
5;3	9	1;5	7
6;5	16	2;5	7
7;5	17	3;0	7
8;0	12	3;5	10
		4;0	7
		4;5	10

Before data collection, the researcher had preliminary interviews with the fathers to understand more about the children, the family's background, and language use in the home. The researcher also informed the fathers that parent-child interactions would be the focus of the research and obtained their written consent to participate in the research. She met again with them at the end of the study to share and discuss the results of the study. Notes were taken during the interviews.

The fathers were asked to make audio recordings at home in situations where they spent the most time with their children (e.g., playing, baking or doing homework). Audio recordings were made instead of video recordings to make data collection as unobtrusive as possible. The fathers made recordings at different times depending on their schedules. Max's father made a total of six recordings totaling 285 minutes over eight months, whereas Nina's father made eight audio recordings totaling 180 minutes in two months. Details of the recordings are shown in Table 11.4.

**Table 11.4 List of audio recordings used for analysis**

File name	Age (year;month)	Duration (minutes)	Context
<u>Max</u>			
Max-1	7;10	33	Baking
Max-2	7;11	75	Playing Scrabble, looking at a book
Max-3	7;11	31	Drawing and writing Italian
Max-4	8;3	56	Playing games (Waterworks)
Max-5	8;4	33	Baking
Max-6	8;6	37	Doing writing, making crepes
<u>Nina</u>			
Nina-1	4;6	32	Playing games (Jenga)
Nina-2	4;6	21	Playing games (Chutes & Ladders)
Nina-3	4;6	19	Playing games (Go Fish)
Nina-4	4;6	18	Doing button art
Nina-5	4;6	40	Playing games (Chutes & Ladders)
Nina-6	4;6	17	Playing games (Go Fish)
Nina-7	4;7	15	Playing games (Uno)
Nina-8	4;7	18	Playing games (cards)

### ***Data transcription and coding***

Audio recordings were transcribed by two multilingual research assistants who had native or high proficiency in Italian, English, and Japanese. The transcripts were coded using CHAT and quantitatively analyzed using CLAN (MacWhinney, 2000). All parent and child utterances were coded as Japanese, English, Italian, or mixed. Child utterances were coded based on interactional categories adapted from Döpke (1992). They were also coded as 'original' when they demonstrated spontaneous and independent language use. Rote-learned utterances were coded as 'routine' (e.g., reading, counting, and singing). Minimal utterances that accept or reject their fathers' conversational moves (e.g., *no* in English) were coded as 'polar responses'. When the children merely repeated their parents' preceding utterance, their utterances were coded as 'imitations'. Another category is 'reiteration', where the children repeated their preceding

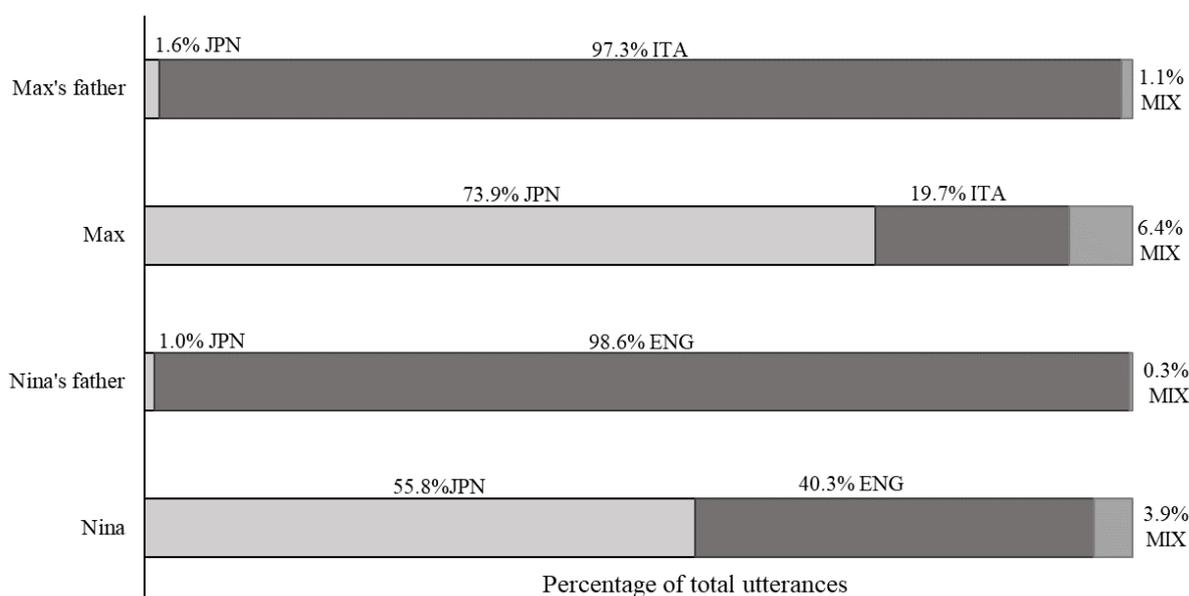
utterances. ‘Translations’ were reproductions of Japanese utterances produced by the children or their fathers into Italian or English or vice versa.

The fathers’ discourse strategies were also coded according to the types shown in Table 11.1. The children’s speech was analyzed per turn instead of per utterance, because parents do not usually react to each of the child’s utterance. Instead, they tend to address either one of the utterances or the child’s overall choice of language in a conversational turn (Chevalier, 2015). Therefore, in this study, the fathers’ response to the children’s Japanese or mixed utterances in a single turn was coded into the six categories shown in Table 11.1. Only parental utterances that demonstrated an understanding of the children’s Japanese utterances and continued the topic of conversation were considered as a ‘move-on’ strategy (Lanza, 2004). New topic-initiating parental utterances following the children’s Japanese utterances were not treated as a ‘move-on’ strategy and were removed from the analysis.

## Results

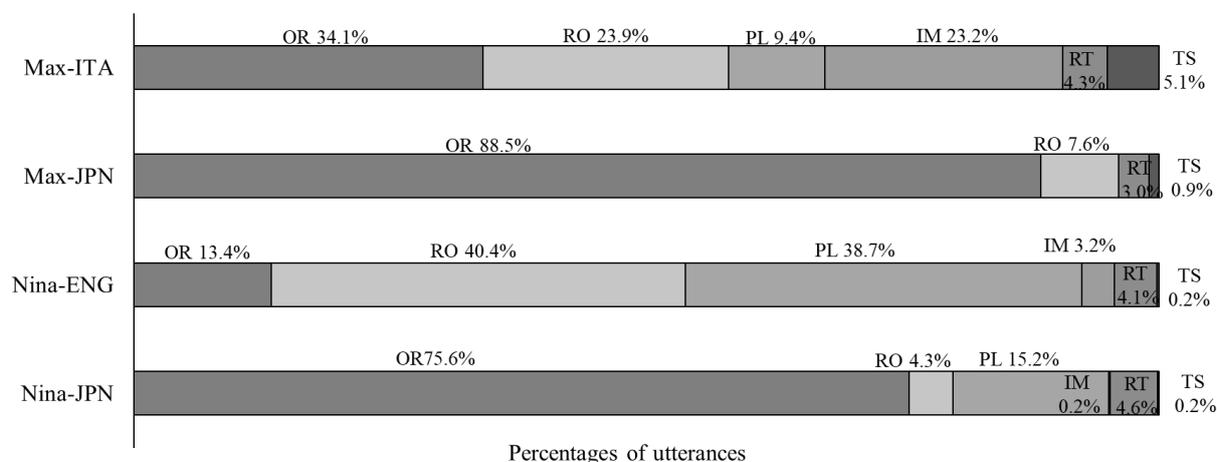
### *Language use*

Figure 11.1 shows the fathers’ and children’s language production. The results indicate that both fathers spoke their native languages consistently to the children. Max’s father’s utterances were 97.3% Italian (ITA), whereas 98.6% of Nina’s father’s utterances were English (ENG). However, their use of Italian or English was largely not reciprocated. Max and Nina mainly spoke Japanese; it made up 73.9% and 55.8% of their total utterances respectively. These percentages were lower than estimated by Max’s and Nina’s fathers at the start of the study (99% and 95% respectively). Contrary to their estimation, the children showed some production of their weaker languages. Italian utterances made up 19.7% of Max’s total utterances, whereas English utterances made up 40.3% of Nina’s total utterances.



**Figure 11.1** Language use in each language

While these findings suggest that Max and Nina were speaking their weaker languages to a certain extent, further analysis revealed some differences in how their languages were used in interaction. As shown in Figure 11.2, child utterances were coded into the following six types: 'original', 'routine', 'polar response', 'imitation', 'reiteration', and 'translation'. The results show that 'original' utterances were most frequently produced in Japanese. They comprised 88.5% and 75.6% of Max's and Nina's Japanese utterances respectively, indicating that the children used Japanese spontaneously and independently. In contrast, original and intentional language use was lacking in the children's weaker languages. Only 34.1% of Max's Italian utterances and 13.4% of Nina's English utterances were 'original' utterances. Although English made up 40.3% of Nina's total utterances, 40.4% of them were 'routine' utterances. She often counted in English and used a rote-learned question (e.g., *do you have an x?*) to request for cards, when playing Go Fish (a card game) with her father. She also produced many 'polar responses' in English (38.7%), particularly the word *no*. Nina's contrastive use of English and Japanese is illustrated in Excerpt 2 (below). Compared to Nina, Max displayed more spontaneity in his use of Italian. Despite having a lower percentage of utterances in his weaker language compared to Nina (19.7% of total utterances), 34.1% of Max's Italian utterances were 'original'. However, Italian also often appeared as 'routine' utterances (23.9%), particularly when he was trying to construct Italian words in a Scrabble game. 'Imitations' were also quite common in Max's Italian utterances (23.2%).



Notes on abbreviations: original (OR), routine (RO), polar response (PL), imitation (IM), reiteration (RT), and translation (TS).

**Figure 11.2** Types of utterances produced by Max and Nina in each language

### ***Discourse strategies***

Table 11.5 summarizes the fathers' use of discourse strategies according to type. The results were similar; both fathers predominantly used the low-constraint 'move-on' strategy (approximately 93% of all discourse strategies used), and occasionally used the 'codeswitching' strategy (slightly more than 4% of all discourse strategies used) in response to their children's Japanese utterances. Their 'codeswitching' strategies were usually one-off repetitions of the children's preceding Japanese utterance. Both fathers

reverted to their native languages right after that, so there was little risk of them shifting to Japanese.

**Table 11.5 The fathers' use of discourse strategies**

	IT	MG	EG	AR	MV	CS	Total
Max's father	6 (1.5%)	0 (-)	0 (-)	5 (1.3%)	367 (92.9%)	17 (4.3%)	395 (100%)
Nina's father	0 (-)	0 (-)	6 (1.5%)	4 (1.0%)	381 (93.1%)	18 (4.4%)	409 (100%)

Notes on abbreviations: *instruction to translate* (IT), *minimal grasp* (MG), *expressed guess* (EG), *adult repetition* (AR), *move on* (MV), and *codeswitching* (CS).

The overwhelming use of the 'move-on' strategy maintained the dual-lingual nature of parent-child interactions. Excerpt 1 (below) illustrates Max's father tendency to continue with the conversation regardless of Max's choice of language. In this excerpt, Max (MAX) and his father (FAT) were looking at different types of trees in a catalog to choose one for their home. The main tier (marked with an asterisk) represents the utterance, whereas the secondary tiers show the English translation (marked with %com) and the type of discourse strategy used (marked with %cod). The 'move-on' strategy was coded as \$mv, and the use of Japanese was italicized.

*Excerpt 1 (from Max-2).*

1. \*MAX: *nani miru no?*  
%com: what are we looking at?
2. \*FAT: mah, devi guardare soprattutto questo.  
%com: well you mostly need to pay attention to this  
%cod: \$mv
3. \*MAX: *ue?*  
%com: up?
4. \*FAT: si perché noi qua abbiamo così poco spazio che.  
%com: yes because we have so little room  
%cod: \$mv
5. \*MAX: *koko? doko? tate ka?*  
%com: here? where? vertical?
6. \*FAT: ah in alto.  
%com: ah, at the top  
%cod: \$mv
7. \*MAX: *mukou daijoubu?*  
%com: is it ok there?
8. \*FAT: qua di lato pazienza.  
%com: on this side is fine  
%cod: \$mv

In Line 1, Max asked in Japanese about where he should look in the catalog to find the tree measurements. His father used the 'move-on' strategy by telling him in Italian where to look (line 2). Max then asked again in Japanese if he should look at the top of the tree diagram (line 3) to which his father replied in Italian (line 4). Max's further questions in Japanese (lines 5 and 7) were also responded in Italian (lines 6 and 8). Max's consistent use of Japanese and his father's consecutive use of the 'move-on'

strategy created a perfectly dual-lingual interaction. The ‘move-on’ strategy was also prevalent in interactions between Nina and her father. Excerpt 2 illustrates their dual-lingual interaction while playing Jenga, a tower building game.

*Excerpt 2 (from Nina-1).*

1. \*NIN: *papa mo ikko yatte ii yo.*  
%com: papa can do it.
2. \*FAT: okay. alright. thanks for letting me join in this game today.  
%cod: \$mv
3. \*NIN: *papa kowarechau kamoshirenai.*  
%com: papa it might break
4. \*FAT: you think? I think I am going to win.  
%cod: \$mv
5. \*NIN: <no> [/] no! me!
6. \*FAT: really? well this should be interesting. you know I don't think I ever played against you in this game
7. \*NIN: *kore ne itsumo mama to yatteiru kara yatta koto ga aru da yo.*  
%com: I always play this with mummy so I have played it before.
8. \*FAT: I know.  
%cod: \$mv

In this excerpt, Nina (NIN) urged her father (FAT) in Japanese to remove a block (line 1). Nina’s father used the ‘move-on’ strategy in line 2. In line 3, when Nina expressed her concern in Japanese that the tower might break, her father used this strategy again (line 4). He also teased Nina that he was going to win the game, which made her protest in English by exclaiming *no* and *me* (line 5). Nevertheless, she subsequently reverted to Japanese in line 7, and this Japanese utterance was met by her father’s third ‘move-on’ strategy in line 8. While Excerpt 2 is not completely dual-lingual, it shows the father’s consecutive uses of this strategy. It also illustrates Nina’s contrastive use of her two languages. While her Japanese utterances were spontaneous and longer, (lines 1, 3, and 7), her English utterance was limited to a short polar response (line 5).

‘Constraining’ strategies that negotiate a monolingual context, i.e., the ‘instruction to translate,’ ‘minimal grasp’ and ‘expressed guess’ strategies, were rarely used by both fathers. As Table 11.5 illustrates, Max’s father only used the ‘instruction to translate’ strategy six times (1.5% of total discourse strategies). Likewise, Nina’s father only used the ‘expressed guess’ strategy in six instances (1.5% of total discourse strategies). The ‘minimal grasp’ strategy was not used at all by either father. They never pretended they did not understand their children’s Japanese. Max’s father also never used the ‘expressed guess’ strategy. Likewise, Nina’s father never prompted Nina to translate using the ‘instruction to translate’ strategy. However, there was some use of the ‘adult repetition’ strategy (1.3% and 1.0% of all discourse strategies used by Max’s and Nina’s fathers respectively). Further analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which ‘constraining’ strategies, i.e., the ‘instruction to translate,’ ‘expressed guess’ and ‘minimal grasp’ strategies, as well as the ‘adult repetition’ strategy successfully elicited production of the weaker language.

Table 11.6 shows that these discourse strategies were largely ineffective. Out of the four instances where Nina’s father used the ‘adult repetition’ strategy, three were ‘incorporated’ strategies (in parentheses) where he continued with the conversation. Excerpt 3 shows Nina’s father’s use of the ‘incorporated adult repetition’ strategy

(coded as \$ar). In this excerpt, Nina produced a mixed utterance where the Japanese word 'make' was inserted into an otherwise English utterance to convey that her father (addressed in this excerpt as 'Jaja') lost the game. Nina's father rephrased her utterance in English. However, he did not pause but kept talking. Therefore, Nina was not cued as to her choice of language was an issue.

*Excerpt 3 (from Nina-5)*

1. \*NIN: Jaja is *make*.  
%com: Jaja lost
2. \*FAT: Jaja lost. I can imagine why. miss spinderella spins a six. everything you spin is a six.  
%com: \$ar

The only 'adult repetition' strategy that was not incorporated by Nina's father was successful in eliciting an English utterance from the child. In Excerpt 4, Nina could not produce the word *ladybug*. However, when her father prodded her (line 3), Nina could produce the Japanese term, *tentomushi* (line 4). Her father then used the 'adult repetition' strategy by providing her with the correct English word in (line 5). The father did not continue the conversation right after this strategy was used and waited for Nina to produce the word *ladybug*, which she did successfully in line 6.

*Excerpt 4 (from Nina-4)*

1. \*FAT: what is that?
2. \*NIN: *wakanai*.  
%com: I don't know.
3. \*FAT: what's that in Japanese? you know what that is don't you?
4. \*NIN: *tentomushi*  
%com: ladybug
5. \*FAT: in English we say a ladybug.  
%cod: \$ar
6. \*NIN: ladybug
7. \*FAT: yep.

**Table 11.6 Weaker language production in response to parental discourse strategies**

	Instruction to translate	Minimal grasp	Expressed guess	Adult repetition (Incorporated)
<u>Max's father</u>				
No. of times	6	-	-	5 (1)
Child production	3	-	-	0
<u>Nina's father</u>				
No. of times	-	-	6	4 (3)
Child production	-	-	0	1 (0)

However, none of the six 'expressed guess' strategies used by Nina's father led to child production. The child mostly gave polar responses in Japanese whenever this strategy was used. Excerpt 5 shows how Nina perceived her father's 'expressed guess' strategy (coded as \$eg) as a genuine question in a card game. She gave the Japanese polar

response, *un* (yes), instead of rephrasing her question using the appropriate English term (line 3). Nina's interpretation of her father's question indicates the plurifunctionality of requests for clarification (Lanza, 2004). Given that Nina was accustomed to dual-lingual interactions, she did not interpret her father's question as a request to use the English term *clubs* instead of the Japanese term *mitsuba*. Her interpretation of her father's 'expressed guess' strategy was similar to that of Tomas, a younger bilingual child in Lanza (2004), who also did not perceive his English-speaking mother's discourse strategies as an indication to switch to English in many instances.

*Excerpt 5 (from Nina-8)*

1. \*NIN: do you have a *mitsuba*?
- %com: do you have clubs
2. \*FAT: you want clubs?
- %cod: \$eg
3. \*NIN: *un*.
- %com: yes
4. \*FAT: okay.
- %cod: \$mv

Max's father had slightly more success than Nina's father in his use of 'constraining' strategies. His 'instruction to translate' strategy managed to elicit Italian from the child three out of the six times it was used. Excerpt 6 shows how the 'instruction to translate' strategy (coded as \$it) was used successfully. In this excerpt, Max's father was helping Max with his writing homework. When Max said in Japanese that he would draw a picture of an egg (line 1), his father instructed him to translate *tamago* (egg) into Italian (line 2). Max obliged by producing the Italian equivalent *ouvo* (line 3). Max's father then asked him again to produce the Italian equivalent of *e wo egaku* (draw a picture). When Max did not seem to have understood his request (line 5), his father repeated it (line 6). This led to Max's production of the term *scrivere* (write) in line 7. Further prompting in lines 8 and 10 by his father also enabled the child to produce the Italian words *disegno* (drawing) and *disegnare* (draw) in lines 9 and 11.

*Excerpt 6 (from Max-3)*

1. \*MAX: *tamago no e wo egaku*.
- %com: I will draw a picture of an egg
2. \*FAT: *tamago si dice?*
- %com: how do you say *tamago*?
- %cod: \$it
3. \*MAX: *uovo*.
- %com: egg
4. \*FAT: *e wo egaku invece di dice?*
- %com: and how do you say *e wo egaku*?
5. \*MAX: uh?
6. \*FAT: *e wo egaku invece?*
- %com: how do you say *e wo egaku*?
7. \*MAX: *scrivere?*
- %com: to write?
8. \*FAT: *scrivere e quello che hai fatto qua. ma questa cosa qui si chiama di.*
- %com: to write is what you did here. but this is di.

9. \*MAX: disegno.  
%com: drawing
10. \*FAT: questo qua e un disegno. l azione di fare il disegno. dise.  
%com: this is a drawing. the action of drawing is. dise
11. \*MAX: gnare.
12. \*FAT: disegnare.  
%com: draw

While the ‘instruction to translate’ had some success with Max, his father’s use of the ‘adult repetition’ strategy did not encourage Italian production. In the five instances in which this strategy was used, only one was incorporated. The remaining four were not incorporated into his speech, i.e., Max’s father did not continue the conversation immediately after using it. Nevertheless, Max was unresponsive to this strategy. Excerpt 7 shows how the ‘adult repetition’ strategy was used. In this excerpt, Max and his father were calculating scores after a game. When Max announced his father’s score in Japanese (line 1), his father rephrased it in Italian (line 2). However, Max did not repeat his father’s score in Italian but immediately announced his score in Japanese (line 3). The father then used the ‘move-on’ strategy by declaring himself the winner in Italian (line 4). Max did not respond to the ‘adult repetition’ strategy, because he was probably more interested in announcing the scores and finding out the winner of the game.

*Excerpt 7 (from Max-3).*

1. \*MAX: *papa hyaku rokujyuu ni.*  
%com: papa one hundred sixty two
2. \*FAT: *cento sessanta due.*  
%com: one hundred sixty two  
%cod: \$ar
3. \*MAX: *hyaku jyuunana.*  
%cod: one hundred and seventeen
4. \*FAT: *ho vinto io.*  
%com: I am the winner  
%cod: \$mv

## Discussion

Previous studies on receptive bilingualism have examined bilingual children who lost productive ability in one language but regained it after being immersed in the language during a trip to the home country (Slavkov, 2015; Uribe de Kellett, 2002). Such positive reports from parent-linguists are important in demonstrating the potentiality for receptive bilingual children to become active bilinguals later on. Nevertheless, there is receptive bilingualism of a more persistent type, i.e., bilingual children who produced very little of their weaker language from the onset of speech and are already accustomed to dual-lingual interactions at older ages. This study contributes to our understanding of this type of receptive bilingualism in its investigation of language use by two receptive bilingual children, and the role that parental discourse strategies play in parent-child dual-lingual interactions.

Despite the fathers’ reports that their children spoke Japanese to them most of the time, the results revealed that 19.7% and 40.3% of Max’s and Nina’s total utterances were Italian and English utterances respectively (c.f. Figure 11.1). These percentages suggest

that the children were using their weaker languages to some extent, despite their fathers' perception of them as receptive bilinguals. Further analysis on Max's and Nina's language use revealed that many of the children's Japanese utterances to their fathers were spontaneous and independent 'original' utterances, indicating that the language was used freely to express their thoughts and feelings. Contrastively, utterances in their weaker languages were mostly rote-learned, elicited, or mimicked as evident in the high proportion of 'routine' utterances, 'polar responses' and 'imitations' in the children's speech (c.f. Figure 11.2). The low percentages of 'original' utterances in Max's Italian and Nina's English utterances suggested a lack of spontaneity and independence in language use. The children's inability to speak Italian or English freely and spontaneously probably resulted in their tendency to use Japanese for expressing their thoughts and feelings. The difference in how these two languages were used in interaction demonstrates that Nina's and Max's abilities in their weaker language were largely receptive. This finding suggests that both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the children's language need to be considered when assessing children's receptive bilingualism. Döpke's (1992:23) observation of how some bilingual children 'never progressed past a limited amount of actively used words, and a set amount of rehearsed phrases', is perhaps an appropriate description of how receptive bilingual children use their languages in interaction.

Despite the children's receptive bilingualism, the fathers' effort to speak their native languages is commendable, because they continued providing linguistic input in Italian or English to their children from birth until their present age. They did not switch to speaking Japanese in the prolonged period in which dual-lingual interactions took place. Nevertheless, their constant endeavor to provide Italian or English input was insufficient by itself to promote active bilingualism. While the fathers consistently used their languages, the children were not prompted to produce them. Analysis of discourse strategies revealed the fathers' prevalent use of the 'move-on' strategy (approximately 93% of responses to the children's Japanese utterances) and the occasional use of the 'code-switching' strategy (approximately 4%). While previous research shows that the use of the 'move-on' strategy led to language mixing in young bilingual children (e.g., Juan-Garau & Pérez-Vidal, 2001), the predominant use of this strategy with the older passive bilingual children in this study seems to have created and perpetuated a dual-lingual context, where it was acceptable for Max and Nina to respond in Japanese to their fathers' Italian or English utterances. It is suspected that the fathers may have created a bilingual context by letting their children speak Japanese to them in the early stages of the children's language development. Subsequently, their continued use of the 'move-on' strategy contributed to the dual-lingual nature of their present interactions.

'Constraining' strategies, i.e., the 'instruction to translate', 'expressed guess', and 'minimal grasp' strategies and the 'adult repetition' strategy made up only about 2.8% and 2.5% of the total discourse strategies used by Max's and Nina's fathers' respectively. A possible explanation for the infrequent use of 'constraining' strategies in the data is that the fathers may have wanted to demonstrate as much interaction as possible with their children instead of interrupting the conversation flow. However, parents' use of discourse strategies does not probably change whether they are observed or otherwise (Tare & Gelman, 2011). As argued by Mishina-Mori (2011), it would be unrealistic for parents to use 'constraining' strategies when they are aware of their children's limited productive ability. Therefore, it was more likely that Max's and Nina's fathers did not

frequently employ 'constraining' strategies, because they knew that their children would not be able to respond to them.

The fathers' overwhelming use of the 'move-on' strategy revealed a discourse style that focused on continuing the conversation instead of aligning the children's language use with their own. Dual-lingual interactions worked quite well, because the fathers and children generally understood each other. However, frequent use of 'constraining' discourse strategies would require conversations to be halted temporarily. This would contradict the fathers' child-centered style of discourse, which was revealed in the interviews. Nina's father said that he always tried to have fun with Nina and believed that she would eventually speak English just like her older sister, if she enjoyed their time together. Likewise, Max's father feared that excessive use of 'constraining' strategies would take away the 'joy of talking' in the child and make him unresponsive. He felt that it was more important to encourage Max to communicate even if it was in Japanese, particularly because he wanted Max to be able to share his experiences at school. Therefore, the fathers' present use of discourse strategies was related to the children's lack of productive ability and their emphasis on communication with their children.

The low proportion of 'constraining' discourse strategies did little to encourage the children to speak Italian or English. Whenever they were used, they had little effect on weaker language production. Max was unresponsive to the 'adult repetition' strategy when he was preoccupied with something else (e.g., announcing scores on a game in Excerpt 7). However, in doing a writing task in Italian in Excerpt 6, Max seemed more settled and willing to respond to his father's 'instruction to translate' strategy, indicating that the effectiveness of a discourse strategy was child-dependent. As Max's father shared in the interview, he usually had to read the child's mood when deciding whether to make him speak Italian. Children assert their agency in interaction (e.g., Said & Zhu, 2017; Tuominen, 1999) and Max's willingness and reluctance to respond to his father's requests to speak Italian at various times demonstrated his agentive role, and how the language context was co-constructed by the parent and child in interaction.

Nina's father also had little success in his use of discourse strategies. The 'adult repetition' strategy was not effective on Nina, because it was usually incorporated into his speech. Out of the four instances where the 'adult repetition' strategy was used, three were incorporated. After providing the English equivalent of Nina's Japanese utterance, Nina's father immediately carried on talking without expecting her to respond, which made such 'incorporated adult repetition' strategies quite similar to the 'move-on' strategy that he often used. Contrastively, in the only instance where the 'adult repetition' strategy was not incorporated, Nina was able to produce an English utterance.

Overall, the few 'constraining' discourse strategies and 'adult repetition' strategy that were used by the fathers had limited success in promoting weaker language production. Even when they elicited some Italian or English words from the children, single words such as *ladybug* (Excerpt 4) or *uovo* (Excerpt 6) were hardly adequate for carrying a conversation. They probably do little to increase the proportion of 'original' utterances that demonstrate spontaneous and independent language use.

Would a trip to the home country help Max and Nina activate their weaker language? The two children had made prior trips to Italy and the US, and while their fathers

reported greater use of English or Italian during their trips, they did little to activate the children's bilingualism upon their return to Japan. Perhaps, this was because the length of their trips was quite short (c.f. Table 11.3). In particular, Nina did not stay in the US for more than a week during her biannual visits. Also, Max did not make any trip to Italy until age 5;3. Furthermore, the presence of their Japanese mothers during their trips may have weakened their Italian or English language immersion. Even when Max traveled exclusively with his father to Italy and spent 12 days there on his last trip, there was no marked increase in his Italian production thereon. In the recording at age 8;3 that took place four months after this trip, 89% of Max's utterances to his father were Japanese. These findings suggest that the trips that the children had taken so far to Italy or the US did not change their degree of bilingualism. Unlike in Slavkov (2015) and Uribe de Kellett (2002) whose subjects were able to regain production of their weaker language from a trip to the home country, the children had been largely receptive in their weaker language from the onset of speech. Therefore, it was probably more challenging for Max and Nina to activate their weaker language. Perhaps if these environmental factors were further intensified through extended stays and greater exposure to monolingual speakers, the children would use more of their weaker language to their fathers. There is also a likelihood that Max and Nina may be more willing to speak their weaker language to monolingual speakers on their Italian or US trips than with their bilingual fathers in Japan. It is possible that the children may have had the ability to use English or Italian but were merely too accustomed to interacting dual-lingually with their fathers. Receptive bilingual children's use of the weaker language to monolingual speakers of the language instead of their bilingual parents is a subject for future research.

## Conclusion

The inability or reluctance of some bilingual children to speak one of their languages is a phenomenon that baffles researchers and parents. The present study sheds light on this relatively unexplored area of child bilingualism in its investigation of two receptive bilingual children who spoke very little of their weaker language from the onset of speech and mainly interacted with their fathers dual-lingually. With regard to the first research question on the children's language use, the results showed that they produced their weaker language to some extent. Nevertheless, in contrast to the many spontaneous and independent Japanese utterances, the children's weaker language productions were mainly rote-learned, elicited or mimicked. Concerning the second and third questions on the use of discourse strategies and its effect on weaker language production, the results revealed that the fathers' prevalent use of the 'move-on' strategy perpetuated dual-lingual interactions, and contributed to their children's receptive bilingualism. The children were mostly unresponsive to the fathers' occasional use of 'constraining' discourse strategies and the 'adult repetition' strategy. These findings reiterate the importance of using these discourse strategies in the early years to establish active bilingualism. Once parents and children become accustomed to interacting dual-lingually, it may be difficult to reverse this mode of interaction.

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