



## Background

- More than one fifth of all school-aged children in the US speak a language other than English at home (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2017).
- Despite growing evidence for the benefit of learning in two languages, bilingualism is often seen as enriching for native English speakers but a barrier to success for language minority children.
- How do parents of young children make sense of these conflicting views?
- Attitudes about language diversity and heritage language maintenance have been explored among pre-service teachers and parents (Byrnes, Kiger, & Lee Manning, 1997; Velázquez, 2009).
- However, we still know very little about how parents of young children view the value of speaking more than one language, and whether their views influence how they support their child's language acquisition.

### Research Questions

1. How do parents of toddlers with different language backgrounds perceive the value of bilingualism in the larger society and for their own child's language development?
2. Do perceptions of bilingualism vary by language background and region?

## Participants

	Qualtrics Panels	MTurk	Total
Nationally representative sample of adults	n=210	n=212	n=422
<b>Parents of Toddlers</b>			
Exposed to English Only	-	n=47	n=47
Exposed to Spanish & English at least half of the time	n=28	n=15	n=43

	Toddlers exposed to English only (n=47)	Toddlers exposed to Spanish & English (n=43)
Parent is Female*	57%	81%
Parent's education in years (SD)	15.2 (1.9)	14.9 (1.9)
Parent born in US*	100%	74%
Region		
The Northeast	15%	14%
The Midwest	30%	16%
The South	32%	33%
The West	23%	35%
Parent Race/Ethnicity*		
White	89%	16%
Hispanic/Latino	2%	74%
Black	4%	5%
Asian	4%	5%
Parent Language Background*		
L1 English, no L2	76%	2%
L1 English, speaks L2	23%	33%
L1 not English, speaks L2	0%	65%
<b>Toddlers</b>		
Female	45%	37%
Oldest/Only Child	62%	65%
Age in Months	25 (6.8)	25 (6.0)

\*Significant Difference between the English Only and Spanish & English Groups

## Method

### 20-minute online survey

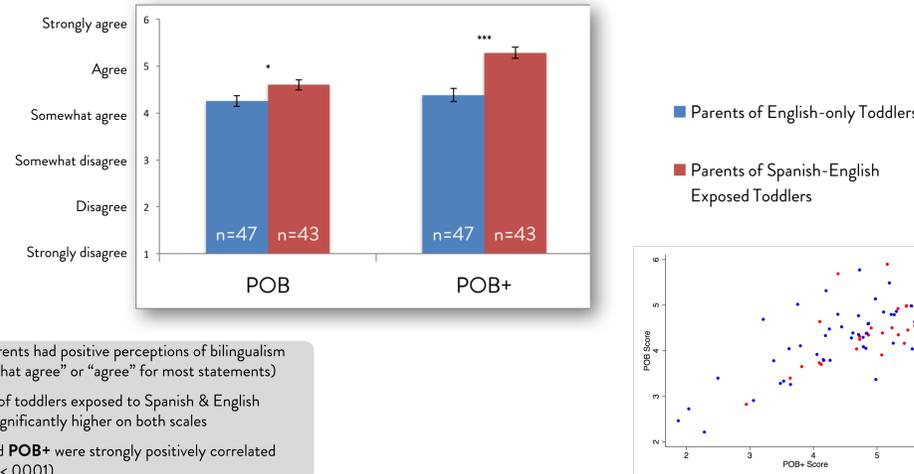
- **Demographic background**
- **Language experience** of Parent and Child (adapted from the LSBQ, Luk & Bialystok, 2013)
- Four optional open-response items (qualitatively coded)
- Original **Perception of Bilingualism (POB)** attitude scales (some items adapted from Byrnes & Kiger, 1994)

Perception of Bilingualism (POB)	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
The United States should have more than one official language.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Languages in addition to English should be taught in public elementary schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Learning a second language helps a person think more creatively.	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Perception of the Value of Bilingualism for Child (POB+)	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
It is important for my child to learn to read and write more than one language.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Speaking more than one language will help my child compete in the job market.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Speaking more than one language will help my child understand people from different cultural backgrounds.	<input type="checkbox"/>					

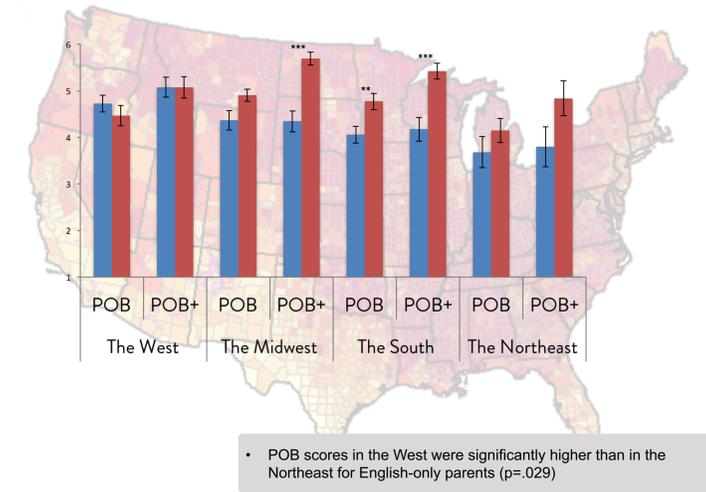
- **POB score** is average of 12 items
- $M = 4.4$  ( $SD = .8$ ) "Somewhat Agree"
- $Range = 2.3$  to  $6$
- Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$  ( $n = 90$ )
- For both POB & POB+, response options were displayed in reverse order to a random sample of respondents with no difference in results

## Perceptions of Bilingualism by Language Group



- Most parents had positive perceptions of bilingualism ("somewhat agree" or "agree" for most statements)
- Parents of toddlers exposed to Spanish & English scored significantly higher on both scales
- **POB** and **POB+** were strongly positively correlated ( $r = .69, p < .0001$ )

## Perceptions of Bilingualism by Region



- POB scores in the West were significantly higher than in the Northeast for English-only parents ( $p = .029$ )

## Themes from Open Responses: Parents of English-Only Toddlers

In your opinion, how are people who speak more than one language portrayed in the media?

### Intelligent, if proficient in English

They're looked up to by others and are often seen as very intelligent. They are also seen as dedicated because they have taken the time to learn another language rather than waste their free time.

It depends. They could be a very smart person who speaks more than one language that they learned in school, or they can be from another country and only barely speak a second language.

Would you like to enroll your child in a bilingual education program or dual language school?

### Foreign or not "American"

People who speak more than one language are portrayed as poor immigrants.

I think they are perceived as not being or trying to be American.

### Challenges of learning two languages at a young age

She is still young to learn more languages.

Unsure if he would become confused.

## Parents of Spanish-English Exposed Toddlers

Is there anything else you would like to share about your child's language development?

### Challenges and affordances of learning two languages at a young age

Los niños tardan más en hablar, pero entienden todo y entienden en los dos idiomas.

Picks up both English and Spanish words at his young age

It is important that a child learns as many languages as they possibly can. They are little sponges and have the ability to learn quicker.

Is there more you would like to share about your racial or ethnic heritage?

### Bilingualism to maintain cultural identity

I am proud to be Latina and speak fluent English and Spanish. It is very important that I teach my kids Spanish before they start school. That way they'll never forget the Spanish language even if they start learning and speaking English all the time at school and with their friends.

I think it's very important that my daughter knows our national language, even if she is a fourth generation Mexican born in the USA. It will help her remember who she is and where she comes from.

## Discussion

- Both Perception of Bilingualism (POB) scales had strong internal reliability, suggesting that items may tap into two related constructs and reflect consistency across the items in the current survey.
- The parents of the toddlers who were exposed to both Spanish and English showed more positive attitudes towards bilingualism than those whose toddlers only heard English, particularly on the scale that asked about the value of bilingualism for one's child.
- Parents in the West tended to report more positive perceptions than those in the Northeast, and the gap between parents of English-only and Spanish-English exposed toddlers was larger outside of the West.
- Most parents expressed positive views of bilingualism, but open-answer responses revealed polarized and ambivalent views of how bilingualism is perceived in society among the parents of English-only toddlers.
- Parents of Spanish-English exposed toddlers cited the importance of learning two languages early to maintain one's cultural identity.

## Future Directions

- These findings are likely specific to the U.S. context; parallel versions will be developed for international comparisons.
- Results are biased towards adults who seek out surveys online; data collection in school districts and lab-based studies will diversify our sample and provide more enriched sociolinguistic information for data interpretation.
- Additional analyses will look at the relationship between perceptions, language experience, and vocabulary development in English and Spanish.

## References

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