DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 365 130 FL 021 710

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TITLE	Parent Attitudes to Children's L1 Maintenance. A Cross-Sectional Study of Immigrant Groups in the Nordic Countries.
PUB DATE	Sep 92
NOTE	13p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Maintenance and Loss of Ethnic Minority Languages (Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands, September 1-4, 1992).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Language; Children; Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Groups; Finnish; Foreign Countries; *Immigrants; Interviews; *Language Maintenance; *Minority Groups; North Americans; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Participation; Second Language Learning; Turkish; Uncommonly Taught Languages; Vietnamese
IDENTIFIERS	Denmark; Finland; Norway; Sweden

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on parents' attitudes about their children's maintenance of their native language (L1). It is part of an inter-nordic study of immigrant languages between generation one and generation two, that interviewed 276 parents of North American, Finnish, Turkish, and Vietnamese origin, residing in Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. Questions were about parents' attitudes to L1 maintenance by their children and second language acquisition and use. Tables show the results of the interviews, and a discussion focuses on why some of the results occurred. (AB)

Parent Attitudes to Children's L_1 Maintenance

A Cross-sectional study of immigrant groups in the Nordic Countries

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Educational discussions often revolve around the fact that parental attitudes, experience, and involvement, play a major role for the eventual school achievement of children. This is also true with respect to the education of minority children in Western industrialized societies where the need for cooperation between school and parents is often emphasized (Delgado-Gaitan 1990, National Clearinghouse 1979, and others). The role of the parent is complex, and in the case of immigrants not always very well understood by the schools. Gardner distinguishes between an active and a passive attitudinal role of the parents. They "play an active role when they encourage their children to do well, when they monitor their language performance, and when they reinforce any success identified by the school" (1985,110). Parents with positive attitudes towards a second language community may also support their children in more subtle ways, while on the other hand parents with negative attitudes may inhibit the positive development of children even if they actively promote L_2 achievement. A similar effect of adult attitudes on child learning and performance was described in the late 1960s by Rosenthal & Jacobsen. In several studies they found that children's school achievement was highly influenced by their teachers' expectations of them (Rosenthal & Jacobsen 1968). We expect that adult attitudes will be equally important, if not more so, for children's maintenance of L_1, and that we shall find a range of active and passive roles of the parents in this respect.

Parents can actively support their children in several ways in the Scandinavian school systems. There is a tradition of mutual consultations and meetings between parents, children, and teachers. There is also a certain freedom of choice of schools, private and public - and children in Denmark, for instance, do not even have to go to school, they have to be educated (see Mackey 1984,166 and Glenn 1988 for the importance of school choice). Furthermore, like anywhere else, parents can help their children with their homework, discuss matters of school with them etc. This would also seem to apply to Third World immigrant parents. But their lack of first-hand knowledge of the host country's school system, and the language of instruction, is often cited as a major obstacle for their children. The parents are said not to be able to play an active role for their children - or even to play a negative passive role. Parent involvement in the children's schooling is often difficult, and teacher expectations seem to become increasingly negative, with harmful effects on the children's social integration, linguistic development, and eventual school success.

In this paper we have chosen to focus on the parents' attitudes to the children's maintenance of L_1. We do this as a part of an inter-nordic study of immigrant languages between generation 1 and generation 2 (Boyd 1991, Latomaa forthc., Holmen 1991). In a parallel study (Jørgensen et al. 1991) we have looked at school attitudes to the cooperation with immigrant parents. In the following we shall present some of the data from these two studies, and discuss their relevance to educational planning.

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In the inter-nordic study, an interview investigation with 276 parents of North American, Finnish, Turkish, and Vietnamese origin residing in Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden (see also Boyd et al. forthc.), we asked several questions about the parents' attitudes to language maintenance and language use. Some of the questions were open-ended - thus giving us the parents' views in their own words. Other questions were designed to for immediate comparison between the groups through quantification. In the following we shall draw on both kinds of data.

In an interpretation of the answers we classified the parents into three groups according to the weight they place on the maintenance of L_1 by the children. This variable is in other words a conglomerate of several questions asked of the parents, and the answers are interpreted by the local groups of researchers. Therefore we have to make reservations about the comparability of the data. The figures appear in table 1.

Origin:	Very Important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Total
North Am.s	39 43.3 %	38 42.2 %	13 14.4 %	90 99.9 %
Finns	34 53.1 %	15 23.4 %	15 23.4 %	64 99.9 %
Turks	13 26.0 %	24 48.0 %	13 26.0 %	50 100.0 %
Vietnamese	22 35.5 %	21 33.9 %	19 30.6 %	62 100.0 %
Total	108 40.6 %	98 36.8 %	60 22.6 %	266 100.0 %

Table 1. Parent attitudes to the importance of their children's maintenance of L_1 (10 respondents omitted for various reasons). The upper figure in each cell gives the absolute number of respondents, the lower figure the row percentage.

As can be seen, more than three-fourths of the respondents find their children's maintenance of L_1 "somewhat important" or "very important". The figures are particularly high for the North Americans (English speakers). More than 40 % find it "very important", and more than 40 % find it "somewhat important". In a sense this is similar among the Finns, although this group is more polarized. More than 50 % find it "very important", and 23 % find it "not very important". The Turks and the Vietnamese spread more, almost half of the Turks finding it "somewhat important", the rest divided equally between the extremes. As it appears, origin seems to be a factor of some relevance to the parents' attitudes.

From table 2 it appears that the host country is also a relevant factor. As could be expected, the immigrant groups are not uniform with respect to this question. It seems that the North Americans in Sweden stress the maintenance of L_1 considerably more than North Americans elsewhere in our study. Likewise the Finns and the Turks: in both cases the residents in

Sweden favor their L_1 more than elsewhere. On the other hand it appears as if the immigrants to especially Finland, and to a certain extent Denmark, are less inclined to maintain L_1 than immigrants to Norway and Sweden. In general, both origin and country of residence seem to be relevant factors.

Group:	Very Important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Total
NAm Sweden	21 70.0 %	6 20.0 %	3 10.0 %	28 100 %
NAm Finland	7 23.3 %	16 53.3 %	7 23.3 %	30 99.9 %
NAm Denmark	11 36.7 %	16 53.3 %	3 10.0 %	30 100.0 %
Fin Norway	14 43.8 %	10 31.3 %	8 25.0 %	32 100.1 %
Fin Sweden	20 62.5 %	5 15.6 %	7 21.9 %	32 100.0 %
Tur Sweden	8 40.0 %	9 45.0 %	3 15.0 %	20 100.0 %
Tur Denmark	5 16.7 %	15 50.0 %	10 33.3 %	30 100.0 %
Vtn Norway	13 40.6 %	9 28.1 %	10 31.3 %	32 100.0 %
Vtn Finland	9 30.0 %	12 40.0 %	9 30.0 %	30 100.0 %
Total	108 40.6 %	98 36.8 %	60 22.6 %	266 100.0 %

Table 2. Parent attitudes to the importance of their children's maintenance of L_1 (10 respondents omitted for various reasons). The upper figure in each cell gives the absolute number of respondents, the lower figure the percentage of the particular national group which the absolute number covers. [NAm: English speaking North Americans, Fin: Finnish speaking Finns, Tur: Turkish speaking Turks, Vtn: Vietnamese speaking Vietnamese].

One can discuss at length the specific reasons behind these factors, and the exact ways that the receiving society influences the attitudes of the immigrants. The North Americans in Finland and Denmark, for instance, live in major international cities, whereas the North Americans in Sweden live in a regional, not a national center. Therefore everyday access to the mother tongue may be harder to come by for the Swedish North Americans, the pressure harder, and subsequently the reaction against the pressure stronger. On the other hand there

is a well-known official policy in Sweden for the maintenance of minority languages which may also have affected the attitudes of the immigrant parents.

Satis-faction: Skills:	Very satisfied	Relatively satisified	Satisfied	Less satisfied	Dissa-tisfied	Total
No pro-blems	135 93.8 %	6 4.2 %	3 2.1 %			144 56.0 %
Good	12 23.5 %	29 56.9 %	5 9.8 %	4 7.8 %	1 2.0 %	51 19.8 %
Okay	2 7.4 %	8 29.6 %	13 48.1 %	3 11.1 %	1 3.7 %	27 10.5 %
Not good	1 3.4 %	2 6.9 %	5 17.2 %	16 55.2 %	5 17.2 %	29 11.3 %
Not at all	1 16.7 %			1 16.7 %	4 66.7 %	6 2.3 %
Total	151 58.8 %	45 17.5 %	26 10.1 %	24 9.3 %	11 4.3 %	257 100.0 %

Table 3. Parents' assessment of their children's skills in the majority language (rows) by the parents' satisfaction with these skills (columns). The upper figure in each cell gives the absolute number, the lower one gives the row percentage).

To go deeper into this question we looked at the parents' view of their children's language skills in L_1 and L_2, and combined this with their level of satisfaction with these skills. For both we used a five point scale. The problems with informant evaluation of linguistic skills notwithstanding (Latomaa forthc. a), there would seem to be at least an interesting discrepancy when parents judge their children to be good speakers of L_2, but at the same time are dissatisfied with their children's skills. This is not, however, the way most immigrants react: It is characteristic of both table 3 and 4 that the respondents seem to answer the skill question and the satisfaction question in the same way. People who believe their children speak the majority language without problems (i.e. row 1) are generally also very satisfied (i.e. column 1). There are also many respondents in cell (2,2) &c. There are nevertheless a few who do not fall into these categories, e.g. the parent whose child does not speak the majority tongue at all, to the great satisfaction of the parent (table 4, row 5, column 1). We have taken a closer look at all those respondents whose answers are at least two levels apart, i.e. those who are in row 1, but column 3 and so on. We assume that a distance of (at least) two levels with a higher skill score than satisfaction score is an indication of (unfulfilled) ambition with the parent. We do not similarly assume that a distance of (at least) two levels with a higher satisfaction score than skill score is an indication of lack of ambition by the parent. Such a difference could e.g. indicate the low status of the language in comparison to the other language.

Looking at all those informants who show such discrepancies we find that in Denmark there are relatively many who are dissatisfied (in this particular sense) with the linguistic skills of their children. Of the North Americans 7 respondents express dissatisfaction, 2 of them with respect to both L_1 and L_2. In Norway there are relatively many who are satisfied, of both groups.

In general there are many dissatisfied North Americans, altogether 15 in Helsinki, Copenhagen and Gothenburg, while only 5 are satisfied. One of the satisfied Americans was mentioned previously. This parent lives in Helsinki and has a child that speaks no Finnish - apparently to the great satisfaction of the parent who says: "Finnish means nothing". It is, however, characteristic of the North American parents that they seem to be ambitious on behalf of their children in an old-fashioned way. One dissatisfied parent thinks that his "own English has been too mixed up to teach" his kids. He wants them to "learn English from someone who can teach them standard, proper, correct English". And by the way, he speaks Danish to his dog. He also wants his kids to learn "as many languages as possible", a recurrent theme among North American parents, "as much as possible, everything".

Satis-faction: Skills:	Very satisfied	Relatively satisified	Satisfied	Less satisfied	Dissa-tisfied	Total
No pro-blems	104 83.2 %	13 10.4 %	6 4.8 %	1 0.8 %	1 0.8 %	125 47.0 %
Good	16 25.0 %	34 53.1 %	6 9.4 %	8 12.5 %		64 24.1 %
Okay	5 10.4 %	13 27.1 %	17 35.4 %	12 25.0 %	1 2.1 %	48 18.0 %
Not good		4 16.0 %	3 12.0 %	11 44.0 %	7 28.0 %	25 9.4 %
Not at all				2 50.0 %	2 50.0 %	4 1.5 %
Total	125 47.0 %	64 24.1 %	32 12.0 %	34 12.8 %	11 4.1 %	266 100.0 %

Table 4. Parents' assessment of their children's skills in the minority language (rows) by the parents' satisfaction with these skills (columns). The upper figure in each cell gives the absolute number, the lower figure gives the percentage of the row total.

There are only 3 dissatisfied Turks, 2 of them with both L_1 and L_2. This group seems to express dissatisfaction with the kids' linguistic skills more as a matter of worry and concern, than as a matter of unfulfilled ambitions. A couple of Turks in Denmark who are "not satisfied" with their children's "okay" skills say that they fear for their educational prospects, and "one has to adapt to the country in which one lives", "okay" simply is not good enough for

that. They blame the school for being too unstructured and for lacking discipline. One says, "I want for her to get a good education here, but when I judge her level I lose faith" (sic).

There are 6 dissatisfied Vietnamese, 4 of these in Helsinki dissatisfied with their children's L_1. These four parents are generally satisfied with the school in Finland, and they do not express worries about their children. They are concerned, however, that the teachers of Vietnamese are unqualified, that the children have too few L_1 classes, and that "there is Finnish and English in the school, the child acquires these languages very rapidly, but she cannot explain in Vietnamese what she has read". Some of the parents even take it on themselves to improve on this: "I teach more Vietnamese every day, I test her skills, if she does not understand something I explain it to her". The dissatisfied Vietnamese parents in other words do not worry so much about the school success of their children, but they are worried that the children may eventually discontinue their contact with L_1, thus breaking up the pattern of respect from child to parent, expressed through language (Harald Berggreen & Sirkku Latomaa, personal communic.).

No Finns are dissatisfied in the sense described here, and of the Norwegian group who uses L_2 more than any other group, 4 parents are even satisfied with their children's L_1 skills(!). These parents do not as a group seem to use L_1 differently from the rest of the Norwegian Finns. By and large the Norwegian Finns evaluate the skills of their kids higher than the comparison group in Sweden. This may have to do with the fact that the Swedish Finns' children are younger, or with the specific circumstances of the Finns in Sweden (cf Bratt Paulston 1985).

In conclusion, Denmark seems to call for dissatisfaction, among the North Americans for not fulfilling their ambitions, among the Turks for not providing opportunities. Norway on the other hand seems to provide opportunities to the satisfaction of both Vietnamese and Finns. Overall the North Americans are the most dissatisfied, the reason being unfulfilled ambitions. The Turks are worried for the future of their children, the Vietnamese for the future of their L_1, while the Finns are not dissatisfied. As one could expect, all parents care about their children. There are, however, differences between the groups with respect to ambitions and expectations.

It is most likely that the different attitudes among the minority parents reflect an interplay of a number of factors. One is the socio-economic background of the minority groups. Another one is their position and status as high or low prestige minorities in the host countries. A further factor is the different attitudes to minorities expressed in the receiving countries, and reflected in the general debate about minority rights, and in the social and educational policy and tradition. Similarly it is likely that parents choose from a wide range of possible ways of supporting their children. In the following we shall look at one crucial means, the choice of school.

Although the Nordic countries are similar in many ways, the school systems vary with respect to the opportunites that are offered to families from linguistic minorities, ranging from language maintenance over bilingual programmes to submersion. In principle, it is possible to attend instruction through the medium of the mother tongue in Swedish public schools whereas this is only so in private schools, or through private tuition in Denmark. On the other hand, private tuition is not possible in Sweden. In Norway minority parents can choose a

bilingual and bicultural class for their children provided there is a sufficient number of interested children in the school district. In all four Nordic countries the children are in principle offered 2-5 weekly lessons of their mother tongue, provided enough children are interested. However, due to local circumstances the mother tongue instruction is not always available - and not always chosen by the parents either.

In order to compare the schooling of the minority children across the Nordic countries, we have classified the schools into the following types, according to the status of the children's L_1.

Type 1	L_1 is medium and subject of instruction L_2 is taught as a second language The curriculum is thaat of the country of origin
Type 2	L_1 is medium and subject of instruction L_2 is taught as a second language The curriculum is that of the receiving country
Type 3	L_2 is medium and subject of instruction L_1 is taught in separate classes, often outside regular school hours The curriculum is that of the receiving country
Type 4	L_2 is medium and subject of instruction L_1 is not taught The curriculum is that of the receiving country

The groups represented in this study have not all had the same options to choose between for their children. The North Americans in Copenhagen have the whole range from type 1 to type 4, whereas the Turks have little choice: their children either go to a type 3 school or a type 4 school, depending on the district. If they do not want this, there is only private tuition left, which extremely few people in reality choose. In Sweden most of the immigrants have several options, but again this depends on the district.

Table 5 shows the distribution on the class types of the children of different origin. The table includes a small group of Kurds who were inadvertently interviewed as immigrants from Turkey. It appears from the table that the North Americans and the Finns are the groups best represented at the L_1-near end of the range. Roughly one-fourth of these children attend L_1-medium schools, whereas only about one-tenth of the Turks and Kurds, and none of the Vietnamese do. These differences are probably not only due to the fact that North America and Finland have school traditions not too remote from the receiving countries', but also they may also be related to the very different statuses that the languages enjoy in the receiving countries.

Class type Group	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Total
NorthAm	8 9.1 %	12 13.6 %	16 18.2 %	52 59.1 %	88 100.0 %
Finns	0 0.0 %	17 26.6 %	26 40.6 %	21 32.8 %	64 100.0 %
Turks and Kurds	0 0.0 %	7 11.7 %	35 58.3 %	18 30.0 %	60 100.0 %
Vietn.	0 0.0 %	0 0.0 %	57 93.4 %	4 6.6 %	61 100.0 %
Total	8 3.0 %	36 13.2 %	134 49.0 %	95 34.8 %	273 100.0 %

Table 5. Distribution of children from the four different donor countries (rows) on class types (columns). In each cell the upper figure represents the absolute number, the lower one represents the row percentage.

When the figures for types 1 through 3 are added up we see that 178 (65 %) of the children receive some L_1 instruction. The largest group of children who receive no L_1 instruction, are the 52 North Americans. This could be due to the fact that all schools teach English as a first foreign language.

L_1 import. Class type	Very important	Somewhat important	Not so important	Total
Type 1	6 75.0 %	2 25.0 %	0 0.0 %	8 100.0 %
Type 2	27 79.4 %	3 8.8 %	4 11.8 %	34 100.0 %
Type 3	56 42.7 %	48 36.6 %	27 20.6 %	131 99.9 %
Type 4	19 21.1 %	44 48.8 %	27 30.0 %	90 99.9 %
Total	108 41.1 %	97 36.9 %	58 22.1 %	263 100.1 %

Table 6. Distribution of children on class types (rows), on parents' attitude to the importance of the children's maintenance of L_1 (columns). In each cell the upper figure represents the absolute number, the lower one represents the row percentage.

In table 6 the distribution of children over the class types is compared to their parents' view of the importance of the children's maintenance of L_1. Note that these two variables are not completely independent of each other, as choice of schools in some cases has been included as one of the criteria of the classification of parents according to attitude to the importance of maintenance of L_1. Although choice of school was only one of many factors, and only relevant in certain cases where there was a real choice, this should be kept in mind. Even in light of this, it is evident from table 6 that there is a relation between the parents' attitude with respect to L_1, and the type of class the children go to. Those kids who attend L_1-medium, donor country curriculum classes have parents who find the maintenance of L_1 very important (75 %), or somewhat important (25 %). A similar majority of the parents of children who attend other L_1-medium schools find the maintenance of L_1 important, although there is a small minority who do not find it so important (11.8 %). Still less importance is attached to the maintenance of L_1 by parents whose children attend L_2-medium schools with L_1-classes (20.6 % find it not so important), and even more so by the parents whose children receive no L_1-instruction at all (30 % find it not so important). Whether this relationship shows us the parents whose active attitudinal role includes sending their children to a school with as much L_1-instruction as possible, or it shows us parents who adjust their expectations because their children do not receive any L_1-instruction, is an open question. Considering that origin was related to class type (see table 5), it is not likely that table 6 only reflects the degree of active role-playing by the parents through school choice for the children. It is just as likely that the table reflects the real options offered the groups by society, and the subsequent adjustment of ambitions.

Teachers: Parents:	no problems	good	okay	not good	not at all	total
no prob-lems	0	0	1	1	1	3
good	3	3	1	2	1	10
okay	0	0	3	4	0	7
not good	0	0	2	6	5	13
not at all	0	1	0	1	4	6
total	3	4	7	14	11	39

Table 7. Immigrant parents' self assessment of skills in Danish (rows) by their children's teachers' evaluation of the communication in Danish between the parents and the school (columns).

We have also taken a closer look at the relationship between the respondents' views, and the views of the school on the same questions. We have taken the Turks in Denmark who seem to be the group that worries most for the future opportunities of their children. Table 7 compares the parents' self assessment of their skills in the majority language (Danish) with their children's teachers' evaluation of the communication between parents and school. In this

table we have included information on some of the spouses of the parents interviewed - therefore there are 39 Turkish parents altogether.

As can be seen 19 out of 39 parents assess their Danish proficiency to "not good" or "not at all". Sixteen of these, plus nine additional parents, are also judged by the teachers as "not good" or "not at all" speakers of Danish when communicating with the school. If we assume that parents and teachers are responding to the same question about the parents' skills in Danish, it appears that the Turks more often rate themselves higher than lower when compared with the teachers' ratings: there are 16 parents whose self assessment is higher than the assessment of the teacher (for instance cell (1,4) in table 7), but there are only 7 whose self assessment is lower than the assessment of the teacher (e.g. cell (5,2) in table 7). One extreme is reached by the parent whose self-evaluation says "no problems", but who according to the teacher does not or can not communicate with the school.

The tendency for the teachers to rate the minorities lower than they themselves do also applies to the children. We have already looked at the parents' overall assessment of their children's language skills in Danish (table 3). The teachers have been asked to assess the same children's listening comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary, conversational competence, and narrative competence in Danish, and for each function to use a five-point scale. The five ratings taken together are either at the same level of that of the parents of each child, or, in several cases, lower. The children in question are six to nine years old at the time of the interview.

The difference may indicate that minority parents are ignorant of the true demands placed on their children in school, or that teachers are prejudiced against minority children. The parents and teachers may also, however, have different situations in mind when responding to the questions. Whereas the parents' impression is based on the children's performance at home, in shops, and at play, the teachers are more likely concerned with school and literacy-related language use. Anyway there seems to be a mismatch. One may fear that this mismatch will develop as the children grow older, and the intellectual and social demands they face in school will increase. Or it may develop as the teachers' positive or negative expectations for the minority children lead to the effect suggested by Rosenthal in the 1960s.

The impression of a mismatch is supported by a comparison of the teachers' impression of the parents' attitudes to the school as such with the parents' own words about this. Sixty-two per cent of the parents follow the general pattern of parents in the Danish schools. The majority of parents express satisfaction with the school, and these parents are seen by the teachers as interested and cooperative, whereas other parents who express some dissatisfaction are viewed as uninterested. None of the Turkish parents are seen as hostile or explicitly negative, as some Danish parents are. But 38 % of the Turkish parents do not fit into this pattern, e.g. some say they are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their children's school, but are seen by the teachers as uninterested. Is this a signal of a cultural and social distance between the Turkish parents and the school? Somehow it confirms the picture we saw earlier of the Turkish group being better described as pessimistic about the general prospects of their children than as concerned with the maintenance of their L_1. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss whether the Turkish parents are just more realistic about this than the schools are. Similarly, it is too early to judge what languages, if any, will survive for more than one generation in the future (cf. also Sirén 1991).

When we compare the Turks in Denmark with the other groups in the Inter-Nordic study, it is apparent that minority groups in the Nordic countries have very different conditions for maintaining their L_1. This seems to depend not only on rules and regulations of the receiving society, but also on the relative status of the minority involved. Some minority parents are offered very few opportunities to play an active role in promoting the L_1 with their children, at least through their schooling, while for others there are good opportunities. The parents seem to react accordingly. With respect to the passive role opportunities, those with few opportunities seem to react either by playing a more active role privately (the Vietnamese) or by relinquishing on behalf of their L_1 (the Turks). Those with good opportunities employ these, for some to their satisfaction (the Finns), and for some to their dissatisfaction (the North Americans).

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