Beyond Exposure: Emotional Attachment in Heritage Language Retention Among Bilingual Families

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Abstract

Heritage language retention in bilingual children has traditionally been attributed to factors such as exposure, schooling context, and community practices. Emerging interdisciplinary research suggests that emotional attachment also influences children's language preferences and identity formation (Ghimenton, Cohen, & Minniear, 2023; Vidrine-Isbell, 2017). This study aims to evaluate the role of attachment dynamics in heritage language use among bilingual children from migrant, single-parent households. This research was motivated by the observation of a recurring phenomenon: a bilingual child consistently preferred the heritage language despite full immersion in the dominant societal language. This led to a systematic review of literature on bilingual development, attachment theory, and heritage language maintenance. The review revealed a significant conceptual gap: although family structure is occasionally addressed in heritage language research, single-parent contexts remain largely underexplored. Notably, only one empirical study (Vorobeva, 2021) has examined heritage language transmission in single-parent families without incorporating emotional attachment as an analytical factor. To address this gap, the study presents an exploratory qualitative case analysis of a Russian-Turkish bilingual child raised in Turkey by a single mother. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and attachment-informed projective methods. Findings suggest that the child's preference for Russian is associated with emotionally significant relationships and repeated person-language associations. Recognizing these dynamics may inform more nuanced approaches to heritage language learning, teaching practices, and educational policy in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: heritage language retention, emotional attachment, bilingual children, single-parent migrant families

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Introduction

Language acts not simply as a channel of communication but also as a context where relationships occur, grow, and flourish. Within families, language is used during caregiving, expressions of love, arguments, reassurance, and emotion regulation. For bilingual children, language means more than fluency or frequency of use. A child may be fluent in the language of society while having another language as a more personal and emotionally significant one. Hence, the languages a child uses may indicate not only linguistic ability but also family history.

This approach is particularly relevant to heritage language (HL) maintenance. Existing research highlights the importance of language exposure and parental language practices (Chen et al., 2021), Family Language Policy (Vorobeva, 2021; Wang, 2023), education and external support (Chen & Ragnarsdóttir, 2014; Yousef & Taylor-Leech, 2018), peer influence (Chen et al., 2021), cultural and linguistic identity (Little, 2023; Wang, 2023; Yousef & Taylor-Leech, 2018), and child agency (Little, 2023; Wang, 2023). Although these elements are important, they cannot explain why some bilingual children maintain their HL even when heavily immersed in the society's language.

Recent studies increasingly suggest that family relationships and emotions play a pivotal role in HL maintenance. Tannenbaum and Howie (2002) were among the first to examine language maintenance through the lens of family dynamics and emotions, demonstrating that HL maintenance cannot be discussed without considering a child's familial experiences. Wang (2023) further advanced the understanding of emotions in HL maintenance by illustrating how emotions such as fear, disappointment, joy, and anxiety influence language maintenance and interact with parental language ideologies.

The findings from our systematic review of emotional attachment in HL maintenance align with previous research. Out of 835 articles, 18 studies were analyzed qualitatively. Positive relationships support better HL engagement. Moreover, language maintenance is often linked to feelings of liking and cultural belonging. According to Vidrine-Isbell (2017), language attachment is key. This approach suggests language acquisition is closely connected to social bonding and personal memories. Research in bilingual socialization confirms this. Ghimenton et al. (2025) showed that family background and history help families form emotional attachment to a language. Linguistically natural behavior is influenced not only by competence but also by interpersonal relationships.

However, family structure remains underexplored in HL research. Kildyusheva's review (2026) shows that although some studies address families with an absent parent, single parenthood is usually treated as background information rather than a primary focus. This issue is significant because in immigrant single-parent households, emotional care and responsibility for HL often rest with one individual. Vorobeva's study (2021) of two Russian-speaking single-parent households in Finland is relevant. The author notes that Family Language Policy (FLP) is not a fixed set of rules but varies with mothers' confidence, experiences, beliefs, and negotiations with their children. However, how attachment influences sustained preference for one language over another remains insufficiently studied.

This is the gap the present research aims to fill. The subject, Mark, is a ten-year-old bilingual child who speaks Russian and Turkish and lives in Turkey, where he attends school. He has developed academic Turkish skills and socializes in the Turkish-speaking society but prefers

speaking Russian. Mark is raised primarily by his Russian-speaking mother, while his Russian-speaking grandmother also occupies an important position in his emotional and family environment. The father participates in family life and upbringing, but since the parents have lived separately for a long time, the child rarely sees him. Mark's sustained preference for Russian therefore presents an apparent contrast with the predominantly Turkish-speaking educational and social environment in which he lives.

This case raises the question of why bilingual children may prefer one language over another, even when they possess fluency in both languages. It is important to recognize that the emotional significance attached to each language during a child's upbringing may help explain this phenomenon. In Mark's case, Russian is associated with family life, while Turkish is linked to the school context.

To provide context, a brief overview of attachment theory is warranted. The theory is grounded in Bowlby's concept of the attachment system (Bowlby, 1969) and Ainsworth's empirical research on patterns of attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Although attachment theory does not explicitly address language, it can be extended to linguistic contexts because caregiving relationships are routinely mediated through verbal interaction, allowing language to become associated with emotional experiences, relational security, and human bonding (Vidrine-Isbell, 2017).

The current research views emotional attachment as a complementary analytical angle alongside exposure, FLP, schooling adjustments, self-identity, and social networks rather than an alternative to other models explaining HL maintenance. The study asks: How can attachment dynamics explain the preference for heritage language among bilingual children with no proficiency challenges in the dominant language? It is important to note the study does not suggest a causal link between attachment style and language preference. A single qualitative case cannot prove that a specific attachment style leads to a linguistic outcome. Instead, the study examines whether information about emotional distance, views on caregiver availability, willingness to seek help, relationships with others, and language-use preferences converge enough to interpret emotional attachment as important in HL research.

To investigate this relationship, the study adopted an attachment-informed qualitative case design combining semi-structured interviewing with narrative, sociometric, and projective procedures. Selected relational prompts adapted from the Child Attachment Interview (CAI; Shmueli-Goetz et al., 2008) were used to explore representations of caregiver relationships and emotional availability. Narrative prompts adapted from the Attachment Story Completion Task (ASCT; Bretherton et al., 1990) examined responses to distress, support, and help-seeking. These were complemented by the "Animal Family" drawing task (Wenger, 2003) and the "My Social Circle" procedure (Andrushchenko, 1999), which provided further insight into perceived family positions and the organization of emotional closeness. As the ASCT prompts were incorporated into an adapted dialogue rather than administered in a fully standardised form, the resulting material is interpreted qualitatively rather than diagnostically.

Overall, this approach enabled the case to be examined from two perspectives: as an emotional proximity map and as a linguistic map linking languages to individuals of emotional significance for the child.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, the case background and methodological procedures are described in greater detail, including the participant's family

and linguistic context and the attachment-informed assessment methods. The findings are then presented across the sociometric, projective, and narrative tasks, with particular attention to patterns of emotional proximity and language use. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to attachment theory, language attachment, and previous research on heritage language maintenance. Finally, the paper considers the implications and limitations of the case study and outlines directions for further research on emotional attachment and HL retention in bilingual and single-parent migrant families.

Theoretical Background: Attachment, Emotion, and Language

Attachment theory offers a framework for understanding how emotional significance in interpersonal relationships relates to language use. Bowlby (1969) conceptualized attachment as a behavioral system motivating children to remain close to their caregivers during periods of uncertainty, stress, or separation. Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) subsequently demonstrated that children differ in their strategies for maintaining proximity to caregivers and coping with distress. Although attachments may persist throughout development, it is inaccurate to regard them as fixed character traits. Longitudinal research indicates that both stability and change in attachment can occur, depending on family and relational circumstances (Pinquart et al., 2013; Waters et al., 2000).

The principal attachment patterns relevant to the present study can be summarized as follows:

Secure Attachment

Children perceive their caregivers as reliable sources of assistance in times of need. This sense of stability enables distressed children to remain close to their caregivers or to explore their environment with confidence (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Anxious/Ambivalent or Resistant Attachment

Children with this attachment style may continually seek closeness yet experience distress even in the caregiver's presence. This pattern reflects uncertainty regarding the availability of emotional support rather than simply separation (Ainsworth et al., 1978). While manifestations of this attachment may vary in early childhood, in middle childhood it often indicates heightened concern about relationships or caregiver availability. In middle childhood, related representational features may be captured by the preoccupied classification used in the CAI (Shmueli-Goetz et al., 2008).

Avoidant Attachment

Children with avoidant attachment may refrain from overtly expressing their needs and may appear self-sufficient during distress, particularly when seeking help from caregivers has not yielded the desired response (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Disorganized Attachment

Attachment behaviors in this category may be contradictory, disoriented, or lack a coherent strategy (Main & Solomon, 1990).

For the purposes of the present research, emphasis is placed on the anxious-ambivalent or preoccupied attachment pattern, as its primary component is anxiety regarding the availability of the attachment figure rather than early separation itself. Older children exhibiting this pattern tend to display heightened sensitivity to relationships, concern about emotional availability, and difficulty trusting others in stressful situations (Shmueli-Goetz et al., 2008). Consequently, Mark's early separation should be regarded as part of his developmental background rather than as the determinant of a specific attachment style.

Attachment theory itself does not predict language preference. The association between attachment and language arises because caregiving is consistently mediated through language. Processes such as providing reassurance, expressing affection, preparing for sleep, responding to fear, and resolving conflicts occur through specific voices, words, and languages. Research on language acquisition demonstrates that social interaction influences language learning. For example, Kuhl et al. (2003) found that infants who interacted with Mandarin speakers were able to learn phonemes, whereas those exposed only to recorded language did not achieve similar outcomes. Although this does not directly demonstrate the effect of attachment, it suggests that language input is processed differently when accompanied by social interaction compared to passive exposure.

Vidrine-Isbell's (2017) concept of language attachment offers a more direct connection between relational experiences and the meaning attributed to languages. According to this perspective, language becomes associated with people, emotions, memories, and situations through repeated social interactions. Consequently, languages acquire emotional significance through the relationships established with individuals and institutions that use the language.

Empirical support for the relational approach is found in research on heritage language acquisition. Tannenbaum and Howie (2002) linked HL maintenance to family relationships, while Little (2023) highlighted the complexity of this issue from an emotional perspective. Wang (2023) further examined parental emotions in relation to language ideologies and maintenance practices. As demonstrated in the present study, factors such as emotional environment, parent-child relationships, parental language practices, cultural identity, child agency, peer influences, education, and the sociocultural environment are all related to HL acquisition (Kildyusheva, 2026). In summary, positive relationships facilitate greater success in HL usage, whereas anxiety, frustration, or ambivalence can impede the process.

Studies on bilingual socialization also indicate that family ties can influence which language is perceived as more appropriate. Ghimenton et al. (2025) found that the language practices of bilingual families are shaped by life history and emotional attachments rather than by proficiency alone. Therefore, a language associated with a particular family member acquires specific meaning for family members.

Collectively, these approaches establish a theoretical framework for interpreting Mark’s case. The present research does not assert that anxious-ambivalent attachment causes Mark’s preference for Russian. Rather, it examines whether Russian has acquired emotional significance due to its use in Mark’s relationships with caregivers. In contrast, Turkish is associated with academic and social experiences.

Case Overview

Mark is a 10-year-old boy with a Russian-Turkish bilingual background who has resided permanently in Turkey and attends a Turkish-medium school. He demonstrates fluency and strong academic proficiency in Turkish, although he prefers Russian. His early language development was primarily shaped by his mother, who consistently spoke Russian and maintained close contact with him since childhood, as well as his maternal grandmother, who also spoke Russian. Mark's parents separated when he was two years old. Since then, his Turkish-speaking father has maintained infrequent contact, primarily through online communication.

At five months of age, Mark experienced a two-month separation from his mother due to her work obligations and was cared for by his grandparents during this period. Although he maintained regular video contact with his mother, retrospective family reports indicate no observable signs of distress resulting from the separation. Retrospective evaluation further suggests that Mark adapted well to new environments in both kindergarten and school. His preference for Russian was evident in early childhood and remained consistent after he began attending a Turkish-speaking school.

At the time of the study, Mark exhibited a high level of social adaptation but demonstrated emotional openness and sensitivity to failure. He sought social validation and required extended periods to adjust to life changes, such as the beginning of a new school year. Additionally, he displayed a pronounced need for his mother's presence and relied on her emotional support, particularly during distressing situations and at night.

To examine the hypothesized relationship between the child's language preference and patterns of communication or personal settings, the study employed methods grounded in attachment theory. Data collection included semi-structured interviews incorporating selected items from the Child Attachment Interview (CAI) and the Attachment Story Completion Task (ASCT), as well as the "Animal Family" and "My Social Circle" procedures.

Results

"My Social Circle"

The "My Social Circle" procedure was implemented to assess Mark's perceived emotional proximity to significant individuals within his family and peer environment (Andrushchenko, 1999). Two complementary formats were utilized.

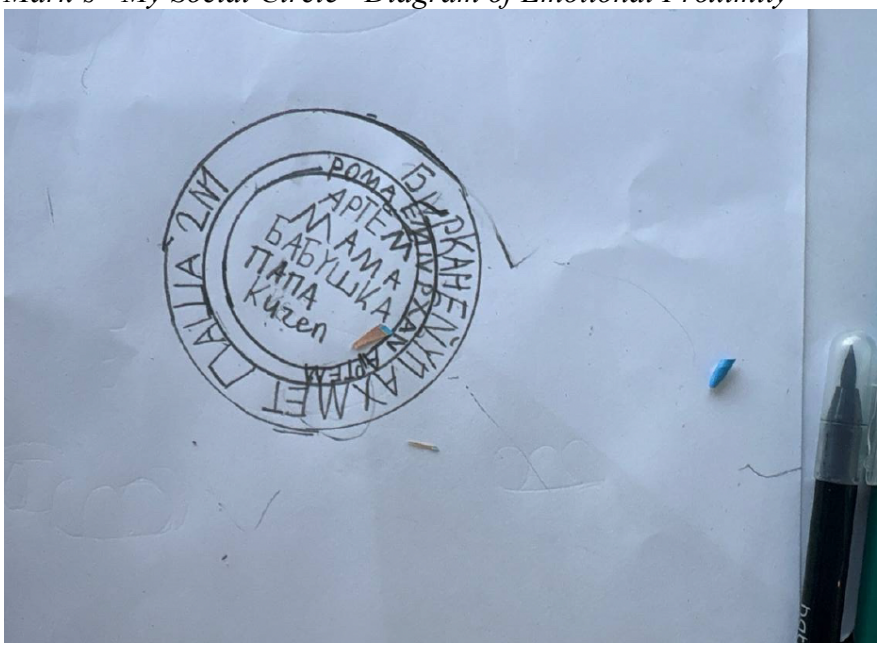
Initially, Mark completed a visual sociometric task that consisted of three concentric circles, each representing a distinct degree of emotional proximity.

- Inner circle: individuals he considered emotionally closest;
- Middle circle: people he liked and regarded as significant but experienced as less immediately close;
- Outer circle: individuals perceived as more distant.

This task was administered privately during an individual session (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Mark's "My Social Circle" Diagram of Emotional Proximity



Subsequently, Mark was instructed to rank significant individuals in his life on a scale from 5 (greatest perceived closeness) to 1 (least perceived closeness). The list comprised family members, peers, and other significant adults, and the ranking was completed in the presence of his mother. The highest-ranked individuals included his best friend, mother, grandmother, and cousin (Table 1; Figure 2).

Table 1

Integrated Results of the "My Social Circle" Sociometric Diagram and Closeness Rating Task

Name	Closeness Circle	Rating (1–5)	Language	Category	Context	Conflict	Additional Notes
Mother	Inner	5	Russian	Adult	Outside school	No	
Father	Inner	5	Turkish	Adult	Outside school	No	-
Grandmother	Inner	5	Russian	Adult	Outside school	No	-
Friend of Mother 1	—	5	Russian	Adult	Outside school	Yes	Rated high, not placed in circle
Friend of Mother 2	—	5	Russian	Adult	Outside school	Yes	Rated high, not placed in circle
Friend of Mother 3	—	5	Russian	Adult	Outside school	Yes	Rated high, not placed in circle
Friend of Mother 4	—	5	Russian	Adult	Outside school	Yes	Rated high, not placed in circle
Friend of Mother 5	—	5	Russian	Adult	Outside school	Yes	Rated high, not placed in circle
German Teacher	—	5	Russian	Adult	Outside school	Yes	Rated high, not placed in circle
Peer friend Anthony	Inner	5	Russian	Peer	School	No	-
Cousin	Inner	5	Russian	Peer	Outside school	No	-

Name	Closeness Circle	Rating (1–5)	Language	Category	Context	Conflict	Additional Notes
Peer friend Paul	Outer	5	Russian	Peer	School	Yes	Rated high, but placed in outer circle
Peer friend Eduard	Middle	2	Russian	Peer	School	No	-
Peer friend Ronald	Middle	3	Russian	Peer	School	No	-
Peer friend Alex	Outer	—	Turkish	Peer	School	Yes	Not rated
Peer friend Andry	Middle	4	Russian	Peer	School	No	-
Peer friend Emily	—	3	Russian	Peer	Outside school	Yes	Not placed in circle

A notable discrepancy was observed between the two tasks. Several of his mother's friends received relatively high rankings in the list completed in her presence but were absent from the privately completed sociometric task. Some peers appeared in both tasks, although their relative positions varied. This variation indicates that Mark's representation of social proximity differed depending on the interpersonal context.

A second pattern related to language emerged. Most individuals represented as emotionally close to Mark were Russian-speaking. However, this pattern was not absolute: his Turkish-speaking father was also placed in the inner circle and received the highest closeness rating. Another Turkish-speaking peer was placed in the outer circle and was not included in the ranked table. Emotional proximity therefore did not map exclusively onto Russian, although Russian-speaking relationships predominated across Mark's broader close relational network.

"Animal Family"

The "Animal Family" drawing task was employed as an additional projective procedure, following Wenger's (2003) methodological description. Mark was invited to represent family members as animals of his choice, without receiving interpretive guidance. Mark depicted himself as a small brown dog and his father as a larger dog, while his mother and grandmother were represented as cats of varying sizes. Other relatives, including cousins, were not assigned animal identities.

Several aspects of the drawing process were noteworthy. Mark repeatedly requested examples of animals, expressing a desire to draw them "correctly," which resulted in the task remaining incomplete. He began with his own figure, drawing it large enough that limited space was left for other family members. He also expressed concern regarding the absence of a white pencil, which prevented him from completing the drawing as intended. Given the projective nature of the procedure, these observations are reported descriptively and are not interpreted as independent indicators of specific psychological characteristics. Their potential significance is considered only in relation to findings from the other tasks.

ASCT Narratives

The narrative component utilized the ASCT developed by Bretherton et al. (1990) to explore children's representations of attachment-related situations through story completion. As the original procedure was designed for younger children, the prompts were adapted to Mark's age and incorporated into a conversational format rather than administered as a standardized assessment.

The situations presented included a child struggling with homework, a conflict with a friend, and a child afraid to sleep alone in an unfamiliar room. The responses were treated as qualitative narrative material rather than being scored diagnostically.

A recurring pattern emerged across the stories. When protagonists experienced distress, Mark frequently described them as withdrawing or attempting to manage the situation independently, rather than immediately seeking adult support. For example: “He just goes to his room, because… well, he’s mad.” In another scenario, adult support appeared after an initial period of difficulty: “She [the mother] comes later and helps him with the homework.”

Adults, particularly mothers, were generally depicted as eventual sources of support, but their involvement typically followed a period of withdrawal or independent coping. Across the narratives, caregiver assistance was represented as available, though not necessarily immediate.

Taken together, the procedures revealed three recurring patterns: variation in Mark’s representation of emotional proximity depending on his mother’s presence, a predominantly Russian-speaking network among those represented as emotionally closest to him, and a tendency in the narrative material for distressed protagonists to withdraw or attempt independent coping before caregiver support became available. These patterns are interpreted collectively in the following section rather than as separate diagnostic indicators.

Interpretation

The findings suggest a relational pattern broadly consistent with anxious-ambivalent or preoccupied attachment tendencies; however, no formal attachment classification is proposed. Across the tasks, Mark exhibited a pronounced inclination toward emotional closeness while expressing uncertainty regarding support arrangements. This pattern may indicate anxious-ambivalent attachment in childhood and a preoccupied attachment representation (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Shmueli-Goetz et al., 2008).

Variations in Mark’s responses across the “My Social Circle” activities may reflect his sensitivity to social expectations. He altered his answers when his mother was present, whereas he appeared less influenced by social factors during the privately conducted activity assessing emotional distance. Additionally, analysis of Mark’s adapted ASCT narratives revealed that the story’s pupils often left or managed difficulties independently before caregivers, particularly mothers, provided assistance. Due to the modified nature of the ASCT, the responses should be interpreted qualitatively.

A notable linguistic pattern emerges in Mark’s social environment. Most individuals represented as emotionally close to Mark were Russian-speaking, although his Turkish-speaking father was also positioned in the inner circle and received the highest closeness rating. This suggests that emotional proximity was not exclusively associated with Russian, even though Russian-speaking relationships predominated within his broader network of close relationships. Despite his fluency in Turkish and extensive participation in a Turkish-speaking social environment, Mark’s preference for Russian suggests that the language may have acquired particular emotional significance through repeated interactions with his primary Russian-speaking caregivers. Language attachment theory proposes that linguistic experiences become associated with people, emotions, memories, and relational contexts through repeated social interaction (Vidrine-Isbell, 2017). Research on heritage language maintenance likewise

indicates that heritage-language use can be closely connected to family relationships and emotional experience (Little, 2023; Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002).

The concept introduced by Ghimenton et al. (2025) further clarifies this point. Bilingual families often perceive certain languages as natural, a perception shaped by socialization processes, which highlights the influence of emotional attachments. However, the authors did not establish a correlation between attachment type and language use.

This reasoning also applies to Mark's case. While the language of communication may hold emotional significance, routine interactions with family members are shaped by the language used. Consequently, Turkish assumes a more prominent socio-educational role in Mark's life.

Discussion: Connecting the Case to Broader Research

The case of Mark contributes to the growing body of evidence that heritage-language retention cannot be attributed solely to exposure or linguistic proficiency. The systematic review identified multiple factors influencing heritage language acquisition, including emotional environment, mother-child relationship, identity, parental language practices, individual decisions, peer social networks, and educational context (Kildyusheva, 2026). Mark's consistent use of Russian supports the view that language retention is multidimensional, as Russian remains significant in his key emotional relationships despite his educational and social background being rooted in Turkish.

The relational aspect is particularly significant in this context. Tannenbaum and Howie (2002) associate language retention with family ties, while Little (2023) demonstrates that both family language shift and its reversal are processes with emotional implications that affect personal identity. Findings from the systematic review indicate that maternal affection and positive emotions facilitate heritage language acquisition, whereas fear, anxiety, guilt, and emotional detachment may impede native language retention (Kildyusheva, 2026). It is likely that Mark's primary exposure to Russian occurred within the family, supported by his parents and grandparents.

Vidrine-Isbell (2017) introduces the concept of language attachment, which provides a useful framework for explaining this process. According to this theory, language becomes integrated into networks of individuals and emotions through social communication experiences. Mark's preference for Russian may therefore reflect not only individual language choice but also the relational history accumulated through repeated Russian-language interaction.

Ghimenton et al. (2025) provide a complementary language-socialization perspective. Their study shows that the language experienced as "natural" within bilingual families is shaped by socialization and mobility histories and highlights the role of affective attachment in relationships with particular languages. Their findings do not establish a relationship between attachment style and language preference, but they demonstrate how languages can acquire relational significance through accumulated family experience.

Thus, Mark's preference for Russian exemplifies the connection between individuals and their heritage language. He primarily uses Russian in informal family interactions, whereas his educational background is based in Turkish. The case illustrates that strong affective investment in a heritage language can coexist with extensive institutional exposure to the societal language.

This case contributes to the limited literature on migrant families led by single parents. The systematic review found that single motherhood is rarely analyzed, even when single mothers are present in study samples (Kildyusheva, 2026). Research on single-parent families indicates that single mothers often assume primary responsibility for transmitting language strategies and maintaining emotional continuity within the family. Vorobeva (2021), for example, demonstrates how family language policies in Russian-speaking single-parent families in Finland are shaped by maternal experience, confidence, language ideologies, and everyday mother-child interaction. The current research suggests that when a single parent serves as both the primary emotional figure and the main heritage language speaker, language maintenance acquires an additional dimension.

The findings indicate that attachment theory and research on language socialization are complementary. Attachment theory explains the formation of relationships and the expectations regarding emotional support, while studies on language socialization illustrate how relationships are enacted through language use. Mark's case demonstrates that these processes intersect, as the heritage language acquires a personal significance through repeated use in emotionally meaningful relationships, persisting despite substantial exposure to the dominant societal language.

The results should not be interpreted as definitive evidence that attachment style alone determines language choice. Heritage language maintenance is influenced by multiple factors, including language exposure, education, personal identity, parenting, and social networks. Therefore, Mark's preference for Russian should be viewed not as a contradiction between language environment and language choice, but as an example of the dynamic interaction between these processes.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the study is based on a single exploratory case and therefore does not permit generalisation to bilingual children or single-parent migrant families more broadly. Second, the ASCT prompts were adapted and administered conversationally rather than as a standardised assessment, and the projective procedures are interpreted only in conjunction with other qualitative evidence. Third, aspects of Mark's early developmental history rely on retrospective family reports. Finally, the study identifies an interpretive association between relational patterns and language preference rather than a causal relationship. Comparative and longitudinal research is required to determine whether similar emotional-linguistic patterns occur across different family structures, languages, and developmental stages.

Conclusion

Mark's case demonstrates that the selection of a heritage language encompasses more than the history of language exposure and proficiency. For bilingual children, language is often closely associated with emotional security, continuity of relationships, and a sense of belonging. In Mark's situation, Russian holds particular emotional significance because it is connected to his most important relationships with caregivers. Conversely, Turkish assumes a more prominent role in educational activities and social interactions.

The synthesis of data from sociometric analysis, narratives, and projective tests indicates that Mark's language choices reflect the dynamics of his interpersonal relationships. His predominantly Russian-speaking social circle, perception of caregiver support, and strategies for coping with stress suggest a connection between language use and emotional experience.

While it cannot be conclusively stated that attachment style formation directly influences heritage language choice, it is reasonable to assume that attachment representations and the network of connections between individuals and languages may shape the emotional significance attributed to a heritage language.

By integrating attachment theory with heritage language research, this case study highlights the often-overlooked emotional dimension of heritage language retention. The findings suggest that maintaining a heritage language depends not only on the frequency of its use but also on the manner in which it is experienced, particularly through interpersonal relationships.

The results of this study may inform both future research and educational practice. It is important to provide children with balanced language input while also addressing the emotional and social significance of each language.

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