

Article

The Role of the Mother in Lithuanian Heritage Language Maintenance

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Abstract: The paper explores the pivotal role of mothers in maintaining the Lithuanian language within the Lithuanian diaspora, drawing upon Spolsky's family language policy theory and Curdt-Christiansen's dynamic family language policy model. Analyzing data collected in 2011–2013 and 2015–2017, the study investigates various factors shaping family language policy, with a particular focus on the mother's influence. It examines the interplay between the mother's role, emigrants' language ideology, Lithuanian identity, language acquisition, proficiency, and language usage across different domains and emotional dimension of language attitudes. Quantitative analysis, considering respondents' parents' ethnicities, reveals that respondents with Lithuanian mothers exhibit stronger connections to Lithuanian identity, more frequent acquisition of Lithuanian as their first language, higher proficiency, and increased usage of Lithuanian within the family and as an inner language. Moreover, positive language attitudes towards the heritage Lithuanian language are more pronounced among those with Lithuanian mothers. However, emotional attitudes towards language did not significantly differ based on parental ethnicity. The paper concludes by discussing the heightened responsibility of mothers in language maintenance within the diaspora and the challenges they face in fulfilling this role.

Keywords: family language policy; Lithuanian; mother; heritage language



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1. Introduction

Research on family language policy, which has particularly increased over the past couple of decades, constitutes an important research branch that helps to reveal the important aspects of maintenance or loss of the heritage language, with factors that influence family language practices, language ideology, and language management (Pauwels 2005; Lanza 2007; King et al. 2008; Spolsky 2012; Haque 2011, 2012; Schwartz and Verschik 2013; Smith-Christmas 2016; Wright and Higgins 2021). According to Bernard Spolsky (2004, 2009, 2021), these three components constitute the essence of language policy. When studying the maintenance of the heritage language, attention should also be paid to the specific roles of the different family members in forming the language policy. There are studies that analyze the children's role (Wilson 2020; Zhan 2023), as well as some insights about the role of the grandparents in passing on the heritage language to the younger generations (Ruby 2012); some have also looked into the influence of the parents on the family language policy and language maintenance (Al-Sahafi 2015; Farr et al. 2018; Torsh 2020). The role of the mother has not been extensively studied. More analyses have been focused on the challenges faced by the mothers when raising bilingual children (Okita 2002; Torsh 2022), the language beliefs of the mothers, and strategies for language maintenance applied in the families (Kwon 2017).

This paper analyzes the role of the mother in the maintenance of the heritage Lithuanian language among the Lithuanian diaspora. The aim of this study is to determine the role of the mother for the maintenance of the Lithuanian language and passing it on to

the younger generation, to explore what internal factors motivate Lithuanian mothers to form and maintain the Lithuanian identity in their children while living abroad. We seek to examine the hypothesis that the Lithuanian ethnicity of the mother impacts the acquisition, proficiency, and use of the heritage language more than the Lithuanian ethnicity of the father. Also, we examine whether the mother holds the pivotal role in family language policy formation.

The paper uses, as its base, Spolsky's theoretical language policy model, which is constituted by the three elements: language practices, language ideology, and language management. However, family language policy is related not only to the linguistic life in the home environment; the decisions of the families are impacted by broader socio-linguistic, sociocultural, socio-economic, and socio-politic contexts (Curdts-Christiansen 2018), as well as the everyday lives, emotions, identities, and cultural and political allegiances of the individual members of the family (Farr et al. 2018; Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020). Therefore, Spolsky's theoretical language policy model, which is applied in this paper, is integrated with Curdt-Christiansen's dynamic family language policy (FLP) model, which considers the interconnected internal and external factors impacting the family language policy.

The population analyzed in this paper is the Lithuanian diaspora in western countries. Studies on this group are of particular interest as the population inside the country is 2.8 million, whereas over 1.5 million people living in various countries declare Lithuanian ethnicity. Another important aspect is the longitudinal aspect of the diaspora: Lithuanian emigration is usually considered as consisting of three major emigration waves: the first from the end of the 19th century up to the Second World War, the second wave at the end of the Second World war, and the third wave since 1990, thus providing an opportunity to look into different historical periods of emigration and the different generations of emigrants. As evidenced in previous studies (Jakaitė-Bulbukienė 2015a, 2015b; Vilkienė 2015; Ramonienė 2019a; Ramonienė and Ramonaitė 2021), heritage language maintenance and family language policy in general are related to the reasons for the emigration of the different waves.

The paper first presents the methodology and the data used. The analysis starts by looking at the aspect of language ideology, which is expressed by attributing importance to the heritage language. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the analysis explores two of the internal factors: identity and emotions. Further analysis is related to the language practices, language proficiency, and language use in different domains and with different interlocutors (parents and children). All these aspects are viewed through the lens of the ethnic identities of the mothers and fathers of the emigrants. The paper concludes with a discussion on the importance of the role of the mother in heritage language maintenance.

2. Methods and Data

The paper uses quantitative and qualitative data. Two large-scale projects have been conducted to study the Lithuanian diaspora, one in 2011–2013 and one in 2015–2017¹, both aiming to investigate the language of the emigrants by considering the language use, proficiency, attrition, and other related aspects. The quantitative data used in this paper are drawn from the first project. They consist of 2026 responses to an extensive online survey, gathered using a specially devised sampling matrix to correspond to Lithuanian diaspora characteristics (regarding the country of destination, extent of flow, and period of emigration) and aiming to survey 1000 respondents living in European countries and 1000 living in other continents (North and South Americas, Oceania, and Australia)². The survey was available in Lithuanian, English, German, and Spanish. As shown in Table 1, these responses consist of mainly first-generation emigrants (G1); however, they do include both second (G2)- and even third (G3)-generation Lithuanian emigrants. The G1+ group represents the people who were born in Lithuania and emigrated as children as a result of the decision of the parents.

Table 1. Quantitative data samples by generation of emigration.

	Count (N)	Percent
G1	1492	73.6
G1+	167	8.2
G2	232	11.5
G3	135	6.7
Total	2026	100.0

The survey consisted of over 60 various types and lengths (multiple choice, closed and open, and scaling) of questions. The answers to the question about the ethnicity of the parents (Lithuanian or not) will be used as the base question to distinguish the respondents. Most of the respondents have both Lithuanian parents (N = 1746), even a substantial part of those of the second (78%) and of the third (30%) generations. There are N = 117 survey respondents whose mother only is Lithuanian and N = 89 whose father only is Lithuanian. Aiming to deepen the understanding of the role of the mother for the maintenance of the heritage language, we will particularly focus on these groups of respondents.

The qualitative data consist of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or via Skype. The participants of these interviews were engaged through the snowball principle, and the interviews were conducted mainly in Lithuanian, with some in English. The interview collection started with the first project, when 177 interviews were conducted, and continued from there on, with the second project adding another 189 in-depth interviews. The duration of the interviews, in most cases, was up to one hour. The in-depth interview scenario included some guidelines that could have led to the revealed role of each of the parents for language maintenance (e.g., who in the family was engaged in the family language management and encouraged some linguistic practice, such as maintaining the heritage language or shifting to another language); however, not necessarily all the participants elaborated much on each topic. The illustrative excerpts presented in this paper are followed by information about the participant: country of residence, sex (Woman or Man), age, and generation.

3. Analysis and Results

In the following sections, we will analyze the data to verify our hypothesis about the pivotal role of the mother in heritage language maintenance. We firstly explore the importance of Lithuanian as an expression of language ideology. We then analyze the internal factors, specifically identity and emotions, that have an influence on the family language policy. Our main attention is concentrated on the language practices, which we explore in terms of self-declared language proficiency, and especially Lithuanian language use in general its use as an inner language as well as with the parents and with the participants' own children. For all these aspects, we start by presenting the quantitative data—separated according to parent's ethnicity where relevant—which is then illustrated and supported by excerpts from the qualitative interviews.

3.1. Language Ideology: The Importance of Lithuanian

It has been confirmed by various scholars that language policy and language maintenance or shift are closely related to language ideology (among others, see [Spolsky 2004, 2009](#); [Curdt-Christiansen 2009](#); [Ramonienė 2019a](#); [Ramonienė and Ramonaitė 2021](#)). In our survey, there was a question whether the respondents consider it important to know the Lithuanian language. It is quite natural that the respondents who have both Lithuanian parents stress the importance of the heritage language (see [Table 2](#)); however, if the parents are of different ethnicities, the importance ascribed to the Lithuanian language is higher in the responses of those whose mother is Lithuanian compared to those who have a Lithuanian father.

Table 2. Importance of Lithuanian (by ethnicity of parents).

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Very important	77%	64%	84%
More important than unimportant	16%	21%	13%
More unimportant than important	5%	10%	2%
Not important at all	2%	4%	1%

In some in-depth interviews, the participants elaborated more on the importance of maintaining the heritage language. In excerpt 1, a G1 emigrant, a young woman living in Canada, expresses a deep appreciation for the Lithuanian language and it being an important object of pride. This ideology is a long standing one and very powerful for both Lithuanians in Lithuania and the diaspora, as can be understood from excerpts 2 and 3, where G2 emigrants of different age groups express a very similar stance. In excerpt 3, the interviewer encourages a deeper explanation that leads the participant to share about their whole Lithuanian world and their particular interest in it, therefore, wanting to pass it on to the future generations.

- (1) *Man yra lietuvių kalba labai svarbi, man yra didžiulis pasididžiavimas, kad mes turim tokią kalbą. Žinant, kiek reikėjo tai kalbai išlikti, iš kur jinai atėjo, ir kaip jin yra tapatinama su kuria grupe ir panašiai... mes esam indoeuropiečiai... man tai čia yra kaip super power... čia tavo ginklas yra, visiškai... <...> kalbos klausimas manau, kad yra labai labai svarbus.*
 [To me the Lithuanian language is very important, it's a great pride to me, that we have such a language. When you know what it took for this language to survive, where it came from and how it is identified, with what [language] group... we are Indo-Europeans... for me is like a super power... like your weapon... for real... the language aspect, I think, is very very important.] (Canada, W, 27, G1).
- (2) *mums yra svarbu. Gal yra iš gimties, nes mūsų seneliai taip buvo, gyre, nežinau, proud, kad mes mokam. [it's important for us. Maybe it's because of our origin, because our grandparents were this way, they praised, I don't know, [they were] proud that we know].* (USA, W, 45, G2).
- (3) I.³ *Bet vis tiek norėtumėt, kad anūikai mokėtų lietuviškai?*
 P. *Aš norėčiau, taip. Aš ir vyras mes norėtumėm.*
 I. *Kodėl?*
 P. *Nes kažkaip tai tiek daug įdėjom pastangų tuos savo vaikus auklėti lietuviškam pasauly, mūsų draugai yra lietuviai, mes su kitais nebendruojam. Mums yra daug maloniau, smagiau kažkur tai kažkas tai limpa, kai yra lietuviška, o kai ne... nu nėra taip nėra nėra kažkokios tai tokios prasmės, nėra taip pat svarbu, nėra to pačio tokio malonumo. Tai kažkaip tai norėtumėm, kad ir jie tą jaustų.*
 [I: but anyway, you would like your grandchildren to know Lithuanian?
 P: I would like, yes. Me and my husband we would like.
 I: Why?
 P: Well because we put so much effort to educate our children in the Lithuanian world, our friends are Lithuanian, we don't socialize with others. It's much more pleasant, fun for us, when something is Lithuanian, it correlates with us, and when it's not, there is no like, there is no point, it's not so important, there is not that same pleasure. So we would like them to feel that as well.] (USA, W, 65, G2).

3.2. Internal Factors

3.2.1. Identity

One of the survey questions was related to the declared identity. As can be seen in Table 3, the vast majority of the G1 (96 percent) and G1+ (90 percent) emigrants consider themselves Lithuanian, and only a minimal part of them claim to be half Lithuanian or of another ethnicity. The respondents of the second and third generations consider themselves less Lithuanian; however, half of the second generation (49 percent) and almost one-third of the third generation (27 percent) still declare themselves to be Lithuanians. Naturally, these

following generations feel half Lithuanian more frequently, and more of them identify with their country of residence.

Table 3. Declared identity by generation.

	G1	G1+	G2	G3
Lithuanian	96%	90%	49%	27%
Half Lithuanian	3%	3%	13%	36%
Other	1%	7%	38%	37%

However, it is interesting that identifying with Lithuania differs depending on which parent is Lithuanian. It is rather self-evident that the respondents with both Lithuanian parents identify as Lithuanians more frequently (see Table 4). However, the Lithuanian identity was declared more often by the emigrants whose mother is Lithuanian (45 percent) than those whose father is Lithuanian (34 percent). This question in the survey was about who one feels to be, and other possible suggested answers were, for example, European, person of the world, as well as the possibility to provide one’s own answer. These options were chosen by less than ten percent in each group.

Table 4. Declared identity (by ethnicity of the parents).

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Lithuanian	45%	34%	68%
Half Lithuanian	31%	40%	11%

When talking about identity in the interviews, the participants elaborated, not infrequently, on the metaphor of a tree and roots. In excerpt 4, a second-generation woman expresses the need to learn about one’s identity in their childhood and teenage years and then expresses a pity for those who do not have this knowledge, talking about them as orphans and associating this to general psychological stability in life. In excerpt 5, a first-generation emigrant presents a very vivid image of identity, comparing an emigrated person who takes on different “decorations” like a Christmas tree, but the roots are in one’s primary culture, country, and language.

- (4) I: O kas jums iš to? Iš tos lietuviybės turėjimo?
 P: Well aš manau, yra labai daug skirtingų atsakomų. Iš vienos pusės, iš labai personal pusės, sakyčiau, kai augi yra labai svarbu, kai esi teenager, kai esi vaikas turėti kokį identity. Turėti, žinai, į ką pažiūrėti. Žinoti iš ką tu esi. <...> Aš manau, dabar Amerikoje irgi yra labai visi bando sužinoti savo roots ir sužinoti iš kur jie yra. <...> Jie sužinojo, kad mano močiutė buvo iš Lietuvos. Iš kokios vietos? Visi nori žinoti jų linijas. Ir tas padeda žmones suprasti save. Ar gal jie pripildo save istorija, žinai, nes visi nori žinoti savo. Yra truputį liūdna, jeigu nei viena dalyką apie savo gyvenimą nežinai ir nežinai iš kur esi, kur seneliai gyveno. Orphans–jie nežino, kur tėvai, kokie tėvai buvo. Aš manau, gali lengvai jausti pamestas pasaulio, jeigu nežinai, kur tavo šaknos yra.
 [I: And what do you get from that? From that having Lithuanian identity?
 P: Well, I think that there are many answers. From one perspective, a very personal perspective, I would say that while you’re growing up it’s very important, when you are a teenager, when you’re a child, to have some identity. To have, you know, something to look up to. To know who you are. <...> I think, now in America also very many people are trying to find out their roots and to learn where they’re from. <...> They found out that my grandmother was from Lithuania. From what location? Everyone wants to know their family lines. And this helps people to understand themselves. Or maybe they fill themselves with history, you know, because everyone wants to know their own. It’s a bit sad if you don’t know even a single thing about your life, you don’t know where you’re from, where did the grandparents live. Orphans, they don’t know where the parents are, what the parents were like. I think you can easily feel lost in the world if you don’t know where your roots are.] (USA, W, 45, G2).

- (5) *Kuo aš save laikau? Aš... Aš turbūt, aš vis tiek pirmiausia save laikau lietuve. Todėl, kad ten yra mano šaknys <...> Tai yra kažkoks ryšys. Vat kaip augalo šaknys. Vat yra, tu nukirpsi augalo šaknį, jis vėl... Vat tą augalą kaip eglutę gali apkabinėti žaisliukais, bet tos šaknys vat išlieka po žeme. Ir jis nieko nesikeičia, aš manau taip ir emigrantams yra kaip ta eglutė, papuošta, ta prasme gyva eglutė, papuošta iš paviršiaus, bet šaknys vat yra tavo kultūra, tavo kalba, tavo protėviai, proseneliai, tavo tavo aplinka, kurioje augai.*
 [What do I consider myself? I, probably I still firstly consider myself a Lithuanian. Because my roots are there. <...> There is some kind of link. As the roots of a plant. You can cut the root of a plant and it comes out again. . . You can decorate that plant, like a Christmas tree, with various things, but those roots remain underground. And it doesn't change, I think it's the same for the emigrants, like that decorated Christmas tree, I mean a living tree, it can be decorated from the outside but the roots are your culture, your language, your fathers, your ancestry, your environment where you grew up.] (USA, W, 41, G1).

3.2.2. Emotions

The survey had an open question asking to indicate the most beautiful, the most useful, and the dearest or the most precious language. The respondents could write their own answers, and rather logically, living abroad, Lithuanian was not indicated as the most useful language. The beauty of a language is rather individual or, on the other hand, can be stereotypical; therefore, the answers were quite varied (e.g., Italian or French). However, the portion of those who indicated Lithuanian amounts to nearly one-third. As can be seen in Table 5, there seems to be no difference whether the mother or the father is Lithuanian (29 and 27 percent, respectively), but the respondents of the mixed families indicate this less often than those who come from all-Lithuanian families (45 percent).

Table 5. Response “Lithuanian” to the question “Which language seems to be...?”.

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
The most beautiful: Lithuanian	29%	27%	45%
The most precious: Lithuanian	70%	71%	87%

When indicating the most precious language, however, the respondents are very convinced about Lithuanian being the dearest one to them. In this case, a very big part of those with only one Lithuanian parent consider Lithuanian as the most precious (70 and 71 percent), and there is no different between which parent is of Lithuanian ethnicity. As mentioned, the question was an open one, so the respondents could elaborate or motivate their response if they wished to. The few longer elaborations that we present here as excerpts 6–8 concern Lithuanian, and incidentally, they all come from descendants of emigrants who presumably do not know the language anymore (because they filled in the survey in languages other than Lithuanian), but the emotional weight of these comments can be clearly felt, and the role of the mother is especially stressed in the comment of the second-generation woman from Brazil (excerpt 7).

- (6) [Which language seems to be the most precious?] Lithuanian. Lithuanian-Americans have fantasticized Lithuanian into a dream-language. It has become more than just a language of our parents and grandparents, it has become a language of mythology and childhood. Of course it's precious. (USA, W, 22, G3).
- (7) muito amada e apreciada porque tenho sangue lituano e minha mãe me transmitiu todo esse amor por sua terra querida! Ela falava com muita emoção da Lituania, pois deixou sua linda terra com 14 anos de idade. [very loved and appreciated because I have Lithuanian blood and my mother transmitted to me all of that love for her dear land! She spoke with great emotion about Lithuania, having left her beautiful homeland at the age of 14]. (Brazil, W, 63, G2).
- (8) Most precious language would be one of my heritage, so that would be Lithuanian, although i do not speak it. (USA, W, 24, G3).

In the in-depth interviews, the participants also spoke often about emotions and feelings when expressing their relationship with the Lithuanian language. This is well formulated by a G1 woman living in Italy in excerpt 9. Also, even though using heritage language among siblings of the following generations is not a common phenomenon, excerpt 10 presents such a case, and a G3 woman living in the USA talks about using Lithuanian for bonding with siblings and generating very positive emotions towards the language.

(9) *Kai jau noris iš širdies va kažką, tai tik lietuviškai, patys subtiliausi jausmai, kaip kitaip, jei ne savo kalba, vis tiek laikau, kad tai yra mano kalba.*

[when you want [to express] something from the heart, it’s only in Lithuanian, the most subtle feelings, what other way if not your own language, I still consider it my language]. (Italy, W, 58, G1).

(10) *Tai man daėjo prieš kiek metų, man kilo, kodėl mes lietuviškai dar vis lietuviškai kalbam, mano draugė nekalba lietuviškai su savo tėvais, ir terpu savęs su savo seserim ir broliam net nekalba lietuviškai, kas skiriasi mano šeimoj? Ir, aš manau, kad vienintelis dalykas mano šeimoj, kad mes galėjom turėjom, tik mes trys, tai buvo ta lietuvių kalba. Kadangi mes viską mūsų gyvenime turėjom dalintis su tais studentais, čia buvo vienas dalykas, ko mes neturėjom dalintis. Mes galėjom pakalbėt apie studentus, mes galėjom, jeigu mes norėjom, pasiplanuot kažkokį siurprizą ar ką, mes galėjom lietuviškai, tai buvo mūsų, toks tik mūsų trijų bendras dalykas, kuris jungė mus.*

[So I only got it some years ago, it came to me, why we still speak Lithuanian among ourselves, my friend does not speak Lithuanian with her parents, and among her siblings, with her sister and brother they don’t even speak Lithuanian, what is different in my family? And I think that the only thing in my family that we could, we had, only the three of us, it was that Lithuanian language. Because we had to share everything with those students (tenants at home), and this was the one thing that we did not have to share. We could talk about the students, we could, if we wanted to, plan some surprise or something, we could do it in Lithuanian, it was ours, something that belonged only to the three of us (with the sister and the mother), that was our bond.] (USA, W, 37, G3).

3.3. Language Practices

3.3.1. Proficiency

The respondents of the survey were asked to indicate their first language. As shown in Table 6, Lithuanian as L1 is indicated more frequently by the respondents whose mother is Lithuanian (74 percent) than those whose father is Lithuanian (54 percent).

Table 6. Lithuanian as L1 (by ethnicity of parents).

Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
74%	54%	98%

Considering a language their L1 does not automatically indicate the highest proficiency among all the known languages, especially in the context of emigration and diaspora. The respondents were asked to evaluate their own Lithuanian proficiency for understanding, speaking, reading, and writing skills on a scale of “good”, “satisfactory”, “poor”, or “I cannot do this”. It is presumed that the G1 emigrants (adults who were schooled in Lithuania and then emigrated) will have a high proficiency in Lithuanian; therefore, for Table 7, the G1 responses were eliminated from the data in order to be able to see a clearer picture of the proficiency achieved growing up in the diaspora. These partial data amount to N = 534 respondents.

Table 7. Self-declared proficiency of Lithuanian: understanding, speaking, reading, and writing (generations raised and born in diaspora).

<i>Understanding</i>	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Good	52%	26%	83%
Fair	18%	11%	11%
Poor	22%	30%	3%
None	8%	33%	2%
<i>Speaking</i>	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Good	36%	20%	71%
Fair	24%	13%	20%
Poor	28%	30%	6%
None	12%	37%	3%
<i>Reading</i>	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Good	34%	22%	67%
Fair	28%	15%	21%
Poor	26%	26%	8%
None	12%	37%	4%
<i>Writing</i>	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Good	24%	13%	54%
Fair	28%	13%	25%
Poor	26%	33%	16%
None	22%	41%	6%

It is only natural that those having both Lithuanian parents are more proficient in Lithuanian in their oral and literacy skills. However, when looking at those who have only one parent of Lithuanian origin, the impact of the mother being Lithuanian is evident in all skills. Not only do more than half (52 percent) understand Lithuanian, compared to only one-fourth (26 percent) of those who have a Lithuanian father, but all the other skills are also more developed, even though to a much lower degree than in the case of both Lithuanian parents, than in those cases when only the father is Lithuanian. Another important aspect to mention is the low percentages of “I cannot do this” (none) self-evaluations, where those having only a Lithuanian father account for more than one-third on all the skills, whereas those having a Lithuanian mother are few, and only the most difficult skill, writing, is somewhat higher (22 percent).

3.3.2. Use of Lithuanian

Similar tendencies can also be seen when looking at the respondents’ declared use of the heritage language. Among those who claim to use the Lithuanian language, there are more of those who have a Lithuanian mother; this is declared by 78 percent of the respondents (see Table 8).

Table 8. Use of Lithuanian (by ethnicity of parents).

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Yes	78%	61%	90%
No	22%	39%	10%

The survey results show that the influence of the different parents to use the Lithuanian language has had an impact on the inner language of the respondents. Tables 9 and 10 show that those having a Lithuanian mother think and count in Lithuanian more often than those who have a Lithuanian father.

Table 9. Thinking in Lithuanian.

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Often	52%	37%	71%
Sometimes/seldom	27%	27%	24%
Never	21%	36%	4%

Table 10. Counting in Lithuanian.

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Often	50%	39%	67%
Sometimes/seldom	27%	17%	25%
Never	23%	44%	8%

3.3.3. Use of Lithuanian with Parents

The survey respondents were asked about the use of the Lithuanian language with their parents. Table 11 is combined by taking the answers of those who have only one parent of Lithuanian origin and presenting data about the communication with that parent, while those having both Lithuanian parents are presented separately for the frequency of use of Lithuanian with each of them. It can be seen that in mixed families, communication in Lithuanian is much less frequent; however, communication ‘always’ in Lithuanian with the mother when only the mother is Lithuanian is noticeably higher (56 percent) than with the father when only the father is Lithuanian (36 percent). One can also notice that the infrequent use of (‘sometimes’) or even not using (‘never’) Lithuanian at all is higher in the ‘father’ column (21 and 19 percent) when compared to that of the mother. Interestingly, those who have both Lithuanian parents report more frequent (‘always’) communication in Lithuanian with the mother (84 percent) than with the father (73 percent); therefore, the role of the mother seems to be more important even in monoethnic families.

Table 11. Frequency of communication in Lithuanian with parents.

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT	
			With Mother	With Father
Always	56%	36%	84%	73%
Often	8%	7%	4%	3%
Sometimes	13%	21%	2%	3%
Never	11%	19%	0.8%	2%

In order to practice the language in the diaspora, verbal communication with the parents is the most important aspect; however, alone, it is not sufficient to have a varied and high proficiency in the heritage language. The in-depth interviews revealed various language management practices employed by the earlier wave of emigrants in order to improve their children’s language proficiency. Many indicate Lithuanian as being the only language ever allowed in the house, with parents pretending not to speak the language of the country of residence in front of the children and similar tricks. In excerpts 11–13, two G2 and one G3 participants from English speaking countries recall their parents’ efforts, which involved reading books or translating to the non-Lithuanian parent. In excerpt 12, a second-generation woman talks about her mother’s “deceit” that she only learned about long after not being able to borrow English books from the town library; she was forced to read the Lithuanian books the family had at home.

- (11) *Mama skaitydavo kada mes buvom maži, tai mes grįždavom iš mokyklos ir buvo tokios, vakarienės buvo du: vaikai valgė kada grįžo iš mokyklos, o paskui suaugusieji valgė, kada tėtė ir mano senelė, mes vadindavom ją bobute, grįžo iš darbo, tada suaugusieji valgė, o vaikai sėdėjo aplink stalą. Bet kol mes valgėm, tai mama skaitė lietuviškas knygas mums. Taip, kad mes tą girdėjom visą laiką.*

[Mom used to read when we were little, so we would come back from school and there were these, there were two dinners: the children ate when they would come

back from school and then the adults would eat when daddy and my grandmother, we would call her granny, would come back from work, then the adults would eat and the children would sit around the table. But when we ate, then my mom would read Lithuanian books to us. In this way we heard it all the time.] (Tasmania, M, 58, G2).

- (12) *Tai kaip taip išėjo, kad aš kalbu lietuviškai? Ir mama sakė buvo labai paprasta, aš miestelio bibliotekai paskambinau, kad tau neduotų knygų neštis į namo... sakau kiiiip? Mano teisės, mano laisvės, kaip taip gali būti? Ir mama, mama pasakė—taip reikėjo, namuose buvo pakankamai knygų, visos lietuviškos, aišku, jeigu norėjai skaityti, galėjai skaityti ką tik norėjai. [(Asked the mother) how was it that I speak Lithuanian? And mom said it was very simple, I called the town library that they wouldn't give you books to take home. I said "whaaat?" My rights, my freedoms, how can it be like this. And mom, mom said: it had to be this way, at home there were enough books, all Lithuanian, of course, if you wanted to read, you could read whatever you want.] (USA, W, 63, G2).*
- (13) *Mama su manim daug kalbėjo lietuviškai, o aš turėjau tėvui atsakyti ar išversti angliškai. [Mom would talk in Lithuanian to me a lot and I had to respond or to translate to father (non-Lithuanian) in English.] (Australia, M, 33, G3).*

Some participants said their parents invented various tricks to motivate their children to speak Lithuanian, involving pets that the children loved, as recalled by this young woman of the third generation living in the USA, where the mother seemingly did not oppose the little girl's refusal of Lithuanian; however, she made it clear that the only two interlocutors at home—the mother and the dog—only understood Lithuanian. Such examples show the great extent of effort members of the Lithuanian diaspora made to maintain the language, but these efforts have given good results, as maintaining the heritage language to such a high proficiency level in the third generation is not a very common phenomenon.

- (14) *Mama sakė, kad kai aš buvau maža, gal kokių trijų metų, <...> jinai sakė, kad vieną dieną jai pasakiau, kad nenoriu kalbėti lietuviškai daugiau. Mama sakė: „Gerai, bet su manim tik lietuviškai galima kalbėti“. Ir mes turėjom šunį tuo metu, vardu Tutis. Ir jinai sakė, Tutis tik supranta lietuviškai. Tai tu gali kalbėti angliškai, bet su manim nekalbėsi angliškai, ir Tutis nesupras. Tai jinai sakė, aš labai apsidžiaugiau, kad aš laimėjau tą diskusiją ir aš taip labai patenkinta buvau, kad aš angliškai galėsiu kalbėti. Ir po poros minučių, jinai sakė, man daėjo, kad nėra kas kitas namuose su mumis gyvena, tai aš arba su niekuom nekalbu, arba aš lietuviškai kalbu. Tai man kažkaip, man taip liūdna pasidarė, kad aš aš su šunim negalėjau kalbėti, nes šuo tik lietuviškai supranta, ir kad aš su mama negalėjau kalbėti, nes su mama tik lietuviškai, kad man tik to ir užteko.*

[Mom said, mom said that when I was little, maybe three years old, she said that one day I told her that I don't want to speak Lithuanian anymore. Mom said: "Alright but with me it's only possible to speak in Lithuanian". And we had a dog at the time, his name was Tutis. And she said, Tutis only understands Lithuanian. So, you can speak English, but with me you won't speak English, and Tutis will not understand. She said that I was very glad to have won this discussion and I was very happy that I would be able to speak English. And a couple of minutes later, she said, it came to me, that there is no one else living with us, so I either don't speak to anyone or I speak Lithuanian. And I like, I became so sad that I, I couldn't speak to the dog because the dog only understands Lithuanian and that I couldn't speak to mom because with mom only in Lithuanian. And that was enough for me.] (USA, W, 37, G3).

3.3.4. Use of Lithuanian with Own Children

Many women who are also mothers during the in-depth interviews stated rather clearly that speaking their own mother tongue seems the most self-evident, natural, and unquestionable way of interacting with their children, especially when they were still small. This is illustrated in excerpts 15 and 16, where a G1+ woman talks about using the language of the environment as completely unacceptable, and a G1 woman elaborates on

the naturalness of speaking the language of one's own childhood to one's children, with this creating a kind of secret world between the mother and the child; see excerpt 16.

- (15) *Bet ir buvo toks natūralus instinktas ir ir aš pagalvojau: "Nu kaip aš galiu su savo vaikais kalbėt angliškai? Man čia būtų visiškai visiškai nepriimtina, visiškai nepriimtina."*

[It was such a natural instinct (to speak Lithuanian) and and I thought: "How can I speak English with my children? It would be completely completely unacceptable to me, completely unacceptable.] (USA, W, 72, G1+).

- (16) I: *O pradžioj, kai pirmas gimė, mergaitė pirmoji?*

P: *Taip.*

I: *Ar lietuviškai kalbėjai?*

P: *Taip, visą laiką ir visus mažičius. Aš, pavyzdžiui, negaliu mažičių vardų kažkokių prancūziškai negaliu aš jų pasakyti. Jie ateina kažkur iš gilumos, iš širdies, iš to, ką mes, ką aš girdėjau pati, kai buvau maža. Prancūziškai aš negaliu kažkokių mažičių vardų. Kai kūdikėliui, tai visą laiką lopšinės lietuviškos. Kažkoks slaptas vaiko ir motinos pasaulis.*

[I: And in the beginning, when the first (child) was born, the first girl?

P: Yes.

I: Did you speak Lithuanian?

P: Yes, all the time and all the diminutives. For instance, I cannot say some French names as diminutives. They come from deep inside, from the heart, from what we, from what I myself heard when I was little. I cannot say some diminutive names in French. To a baby, the lullabies were always in Lithuanian. Some kind of secret world of the child and the mother.] (France, W, 32, G1).

When living in emigration surrounded by another language, however, one cannot not consider the effect of the language of the environment on the language of the children. This is not infrequently seen as a responsibility of the parents to control, and the mothers get particularly anxious about their children not having the same linguistic proficiency as in the home country. Sometimes, the mothers get anxious and try to impose the language onto the children, only to reach an opposite result. Excerpt 17 presents a situation where the mother had to become aware of not being able to impose the heritage language in all situations and having to overcome the feeling of guilt about it.

- (17) I.: *O kaip jum kokie jausmai kyła dėl to, kad jos (dukros) tarpusavy šneka vokiškai? Ar atrodo, kad čia normalu ir nieko tokio ar. . .*

R. *Iš pradžių gal siek tiek sakyčiau jaučiausi atsakinga ir galbūt kalta, kad vaikai tarpusavy nekalba lietuviškai. Kol paskiau supratau, kad per prievartą nieko nepasieksi, per prievartą galim prie stalo, kai sėdim, pusryčiaujam ir galima tada kalbėti lietuviškai ir mes jas galim kontroliuoti, bet pastoviai kontrolėje vaikus laikytis yra negerai. Aš negaliu nueiti į viršų ir stebėti, kaip jos žaidžia ir įsiterpti į jų žaidimo fazę ir nutraukti vien dėl kalbos. Va, ir tada nustojau save graužti. Iš pradžių tai buvo sakyčiau ir Lietuvoj, seneliai mus kaltindavo, kai mes nuvažiuodavom, kad vaikai sunkiau šneka, kad va jaučiasi jau pas Gretą akcentas ir va visą kitą ir ta kaltė mum visą laiką būdavo, kaip jūs abudu lietuviai, kaip jūs drįstat, kad jūsų vaikai nekalba lietuviškai. Sakykim, ne taip kalba, kaip jie tyrėtų kalbėti. Ir jie nesupranta, kad mes turim ir savo šičia kitą pasaulį.*

[I: And how do you feel about the fact that they (daughters) talk German among themselves? Do you think it's normal and it's ok or. . .

R: At first I would somehow feel responsible and maybe guilty, that the children do not speak Lithuanian among themselves. Until later I understood that you cannot achieve anything by forcing, by force we can do it at the table, when we are sitting down, having breakfast and then they are only allowed to speak Lithuanian and we can control them, but it's not good to keep the children under control all the time. I cannot go upstairs and observe them play and interfere in their playing phase and disrupt only because of the language. So then I stopped nagging myself. At first it was also in Lithuania, I would say, the grandparents would blame us when we used to come, that the children have more difficulties speaking, that Greta already has an

accent and so on and this guilt was for us all the time, that how dare you, both being Lithuanian, that your children do not speak Lithuanian. Let's say, they don't speak in the right way, as they should. And they don't understand that we have also our other world here.] (Germany, W, 34, G1).

One more aspect we can look at from the survey data is how the respondents declare to behave with their own children, i.e., how often they use Lithuanian when speaking to them. Not all of the respondents have children (those who do: N = 1175), but when separated by sex, the data support the claim that mothers do tend to communicate with their children more in the heritage language; see Table 12. Even though the number of female respondents is higher in general, and the responses to "always" is very similar between the mothers and the fathers; the differences in "often" and "never" responses are significant, and it can be seen that the mothers are more inclined to use the heritage language than the fathers.

Table 12. Frequency of using Lithuanian with own children.

	Woman	Man
Always	58%	59%
Often	19%	12%
Sometimes	12%	13%
Never	10%	17%

In excerpt 18, we can see the reflection of a G1 mother, who claims not to have even posed herself the question whether to speak Lithuanian with her children and was so strong in her conviction that the children never doubted it. A funny story with another Lithuanian-speaking emigrant who used the local language with his dog made her reflect about maybe having traumatized her own children; however, the fact that the children have acquired perfect Lithuanian is a confirmation of her right choice.

- (18) *Tai atrodė, sakau, tai, kad vaikam, jiems primėčiau tą kalbą, jie, matyt, kažkaip tai iš mano pusės buvo taip... taip pateikta, kad niekada vaikai man to net, net nesuabejojo, kad jos, ar gal reikėtų nereikėti, ar, ar, žodžiu, ir todėl... žodžiu, niekada aš jiems neleidau tuo suabejoti ir, ir tai buvo būtinybė, tai buvo būtinybė, nes neišsivaizdavau, kaip su seneliais grįžus, ar ką ir, ir... užtai... Dėl to man ir sakau... Ir net smerčiau didelį lietuvininką Italijos, kuri ir pats išsaugojęs kalbą puikiai ir pats išsaugojęs seną lietuvišką pasą dar, su kuriuo susipažinau dar sovietiniais laikais, kuris sakė, kad grįšiu į Lietuvą tik tada kai galėsiu įvažiuoti su tuo pačiu pasu. Turėjo šuniuką, vardą lietuvišką davė—Juodukas, bet bendraudavo su itališkai. Ir man, pamenu, ten vasarą tada pas jį Alpėse tada tada turėjo... Ir aš jam drįsau papriekaištau, sakau: „Kodėl jūs su savo šuniuku?“ Tai jis man paaiškino, kad jis nenorėjo jo traumuoti, nes kadangi, kadangi jis vis tiek gyveno itališkoj aplinkoj, girdi ir kitų balsus, tai jis nenori... bet aš pagalvojau, kad aš apie tai nesu galvojęs, aš savo vaikus negal... Traumavau galbūt, bet aš su jais kalbėjau lietuviškai ir jie išmoko puikiai lietuviškai, išmoko puikiai atsirinkti ir, ir, ir, pagal mane, neliko traumuoti.*

[So it seemed that I forced the language onto the children, probably from my part it was presented in such a way... that the children never even doubted that maybe it could not be necessary, or something, so... so I never let them doubt it and it was a necessity, it was a necessity because I could not imagine how would they speak with the grandparents when they came back or something and... that's why I even judged a great pro-Lithuanian minded person in Italy, who himself has maintained the language perfectly and had kept the old Lithuanian passport, who I met still during the soviet times, who said that he would only go back to Lithuania when he could use the same passport. He had a small dog, he had given it a Lithuanian name: Juodukas, but he would speak Italian to it. And I remember, we were spending the summer at his place then in the Alps... so I dared to rebuke him, I said "Why do you with your dog?" So he explained to me that he didn't want to traumatize the dog because it lives in an Italian environment, hears also the voices of others so he

doesn't want. . . but I thought that had never considered that, with my children maybe I. . . maybe I traumatized them but I spoke Lithuanian to them and they acquired Lithuanian perfectly, they learned to distinguish perfectly and, I think, they did not remain traumatized.] (Italy, W, 58, G1).

4. Concluding Discussion on the Perceived Role of the Mother

The quantitative data seem to all point to the same direction, that the mother has more impact in maintaining the heritage language. Thus, the initial hypothesis can be considered confirmed. The role of the mother is distinct and differs from that of the father. Lithuanian mothers seem to transmit a stronger positive language ideology associated with the Lithuanian language, and they contribute to forming a clearer Lithuanian identity. Among the internal factors that impact family language policy, only the emotional ones seem to be equally influenced by the mother and by the father. The heritage Lithuanian language is considered the most precious language by a very large proportion of respondents, and here, the influences of different family members were not observed. However, there is a clear difference in influence when looking at language practices and declared language competence. The quantitative data highlight the special role of the mother. Respondents who have Lithuanian mothers more frequently declare the Lithuanian language as their first language, acquired at home, feel more proficient in their heritage language in all skills, and use Lithuanian more often in all communicative situations.

This is also often elaborated on in the qualitative interviews. Many participants, in a more or less direct way, indicated the mother as the one more impactful and having contributed more to the maintenance or passing on the concept of the importance of the Lithuanian language. In excerpt 19, a second-generation woman is stating it rather clearly, that "it depends more on the mother" when talking about her son, whose wife is not of Lithuanian origin, and therefore, possibly, he will not be putting much effort into passing on his heritage language to the children, whereas she has more expectations from her own daughter.

(19) *Matot, marti, mūsų marti, kai ne lietuvė, aš nežinau, aš nemanau, kad jai yra ypatingas interesas, kad būtų vienaip ar kitaip, o sūnus. . . nuo mamos daugiau priklauso, man atrodo, o sūnus aš nežinau, kokias jisai pastangas dės, ar jis išvis dės, o dukra, dar neturi savo vaiku, tai pamatysim, jei ateity atsiras, gal tada bus šiek tiek kitaip.*

[You see, our daughter-in-law, when she is not Lithuanian, I don't know, I don't think she has a particular interest for it to be one way or the other, and our son. . . it depends more on the mother, I think, and our son, I don't know what kind of efforts will he make, if he will make them at all, and our daughter, she doesn't have children of her own yet, so we'll see, if there will be any in the future, maybe it will be somewhat different.] (USA, W, 65, G2).

The importance of maintaining the Lithuanian language has been especially upheld by the emigrants of the second wave (war refugees). Given the political situation when Lithuania was occupied by the soviets, the consciousness of this importance was felt as nearly a sacred obligation. This is often encountered in the interviews with the descendants of this wave, as presented in excerpt 20.

(20) *Didžiavosi mūsų tėvai. Kaip po biški pasidaro tokia, kokį žodį yra, obligation, nes jeigu aš sustosiu—kas atsitiks? žinai, jeigu mano vaikai neišmoks, tai ten jau bus baigta mūsų šeimoj, žinai, ir jau baigsis ta mūsų kultūra. Tai aš tą bandau Karinai sakyti. Sakau, kad kai tu turėsi vaikus, tu galėsi nutarti. Jeigu tu stosi kalbėti, tai mūsų šeimoj jo nebus. Aš nenoriu būti, ta kuris sustabdys mūsų šeimoj, žinai. Yra responsibility beveik, kad reikia išlaikyti, nes jeigu mes neišlaikysim—nebus daugiau, išnaikins. Nors dabar, žinai, kaip pasaulis pamažėjo, čia daug lietuvių iš Lietuvos atsikrausto, tai gal ne tikrai nutiltų visiškai. Bet taip mes galvojame, kad reikia išlaikyti, nes kitaip nebus daugiau.*

[Our parents were proud. And little by little it becomes like, what's the word, obligation, because if I stop, what will happen? You know, if my children do not learn, it

will be over in our family, you know, our culture will be finished. That's what I try to tell Karina. I say, when you have kids, you can decide. If you stop speaking, it will disappear from our family. I don't want to be the one who stops it in our family, you know. It's almost a responsibility, to maintain, because if we don't maintain, it will be gone, they will destroy it. Even if now, you know, when the world has become smaller, many Lithuanians come here from Lithuania, maybe it would not be quieted for good. But that's how we think, that we need to maintain because otherwise it will be no more.] (USA, W, 45, G2).

Emigrants belonging to waves of a more economic nature, such as the most recent one starting from 1990, who left Lithuania when the country is no longer in danger of extinction, feel somewhat less the vital aspect of survival. Nevertheless, the pressure to maintain the heritage Lithuanian language is rather strongly felt, especially by the mothers. The failure to achieve this desired result seems to cause more distress to the mothers than to the fathers. The mothers often feel almost exclusively responsible for the children's education and their language acquisition, as noted by other researchers (Okita 2002; Kwon 2017; Torsh 2022).

Therefore, our study and other previous studies indicate the role of the mother generally being more influential than that of the father. However, the changing family models in the modern western societies have an impact on the capabilities of mothers to dedicate the time, effort, and resources they consider important for the maintenance of the heritage language. For instance, in the case of a single Lithuanian mother living abroad, she can not only offer less input in the heritage language at home when compared to a situation of both Lithuanian parents, but also often has less material possibilities to provide larger heritage language community input. In cases of mixed families, when the residence is in the father's linguistic environment, an immigrant mother might have (at least perceived) a lower social status in the society and, therefore, encounter more difficulties in passing on their heritage language to the children. The mothers who do not succeed in accomplishing this vital task feel guilt and even shame, leading to refusing to participate in a study that would dig into the aspect they see as their life's biggest failure. Nevertheless, the responsibility felt by the mothers and the importance of their role does not diminish; therefore, more specific studies would help shed more light on the topic.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the connection between identity and language is particularly strong for Lithuanians, and this is not necessarily the case in all cultures. Language is the core value of Lithuanian identity; therefore, passing on the Lithuanian language, rather than culinary tradition, for instance, is perceived as matter of particular significance. In the context of globalization and increasing mobility, different cultures and social values interact in the same communities, and the mothers are faced with even more complex challenges. The study of the role of the mother continues, therefore, to be of great importance, and both a more profound investigation on a wider variety of family situations and a comparison among different cultural backgrounds would help to explore this complex issue and make this claim even stronger.

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Notes

- ¹ Both projects were financed by the State Commission of the Lithuanian language; detailed descriptions and results are published in two collective monographies (see Ramonienė 2015, 2019b).
- ² Only respondents who have lived outside of Lithuania for no less than three years were included in the sample.
- ³ I—interviewer; P—participant.

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