

Sustainable Solutions to Common Language Difficulties in Bilingual Families¹

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Abstract

This article shares helpful, research-backed ways that parents can support minority languages in their children's lives. Many parents around the world face language struggles, including losing heritage languages to the community language or trying to support a foreign language to increase future opportunities. For example, parents in Mexico may want to encourage their children to speak Náhuatl with older family members, but the children prefer Spanish due to its widespread use and status in the community. This same family may encourage their children to study English in order to increase future employment and travel opportunities. However, asking children to become bi- or even trilingual can feel like a time-intensive, stressful, and expensive task. It doesn't have to be a negative experience, though! This article provides tips and strategies, both theoretical and practical, for encouraging minority language study and use in the household, touching on aspects of bilingualism such as literacy, inter-sibling language use, technology, and cost-cutting measures. Families from all over the globe and of any size can utilize this information to encourage bilingualism or multilingualism in their families.

Resumen

Este artículo comparte formas útiles y respaldadas por investigaciones en las que los padres pueden apoyar los idiomas minoritarios en la vida de sus hijos. Muchos padres de todo el mundo enfrentan dificultades con el idioma, incluida la pérdida de idiomas heredados por el idioma de la comunidad o el intento de apoyar un idioma extranjero para aumentar las oportunidades futuras. Por ejemplo, los padres en México pueden querer alentar a sus hijos a hablar náhuatl con miembros de la familia, pero los niños prefieren el español debido a su uso generalizado y su estatus en la comunidad. Esta misma familia puede alentar a sus hijos a estudiar inglés también para aumentar las oportunidades futuras. Sin embargo, pedirles a los niños que sean bilingües o incluso trilingües puede parecer una tarea costosa, estresante y que requiere mucho tiempo. ¡Sin embargo, no tiene por qué ser una experiencia negativa! Proporciono consejos y estrategias, tanto teóricas como prácticas, para fomentar el estudio y el uso de lenguas minoritarias en el hogar, abordando aspectos del bilingüismo como la alfabetización, el uso del idioma entre hermanos, la tecnología y las medidas de reducción de costos. Las familias de todo el mundo y de cualquier tamaño pueden utilizar esta información para fomentar el bilingüismo o el multilingüismo en sus familias.

Introduction

Many parents all over the world these days aspire for their children to be bilingual or even trilingual. I am one of them, and am working to raise trilingual children. My partner and I are both from the USA, but we have lived abroad for the entirety of our three kids' lives. Our first two children were born in Japan and when they were four and two years old we moved to Mexico for two years. While there our youngest child was born, and then we moved back to Japan, where we have lived for two more years. We are attempting to raise trilingual kids in English, Japanese, and Spanish while currently living in Japan. Therefore, most of the language references and anecdotes in this article will involve those three languages. However, the scientific basis for language growth and the practice lessons learned are applicable to families of any shapes and sizes learning any combination of languages.

As far as global multilingualism, in Mexico, for example, in 2005 over 90% of Mexican people were monolingual (Pletcher, 2020). Speaking a heritage language—a language that is not spoken widely in the community or a language spoken in the home by people from a cultural minority group—can give people a strong connection to their culture and relatives while speaking a foreign language such as Mandarin or English can help improve employment prospects. According to the National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Informatics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI), the number of people living in Mexico over the age of 5 who speak an indigenous language has fallen from 16 percent in 1930 to 6.6 percent in 2015 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2015). This is happening worldwide and

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many people are now fighting this disheartening trend. For example, on a global scale, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared 2019 to be “The Year of Indigenous Languages” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018). In Mexico, the general law on the linguistic rights of indigenous people was passed in 2003. This law is meant to, among other things, advocate for the support and use of indigenous languages (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 2003). More locally, communities, schools, and families are doing their best to support and enrich their indigenous languages. Many parents from indigenous, minority or multicultural families in Mexico desperately want their children to be equally fluent in their own heritage language as well as the dominant language where they live. Unfortunately, parents often see their children’s preference for speaking Spanish grow stronger and stronger until the minority language (ML) becomes only passively used. Although these parents have the will to raise fully bilingual children, they lack the way, because they “have relatively little information about the processes” and the challenges involved in such a difficult task (King & Fogle, 2006a, p. 707). This is a problem in many countries. For example, many parents desiring to raise bilingual children in the USA find “English quickly displacing and replacing the primary language in young first-generation immigrants” (Fillmore, 2000, p. 203).

Mistakes and Lessons Learned

This article will offer solutions to common challenges faced by parents attempting to raise bilingual or multilingual children around the world. It does take a lot of preparation, work, and dedication, but children from bilingual or multilingual families can learn minority languages as fluently as the community languages. If parents make a plan and follow it, then their plan can positively impact their children’s development, support their academic future and maintain the minority language (King et al., 2008). This article contains practical, sustainable suggestions to encourage balanced bilingualism, each of which has been tried and tested by my family.

In the beginning I was fairly naïve about the process of multilingualism and had assumed that kids would simply absorb any languages they were exposed to and cheerfully speak them indefinitely. Therefore, my husband and I never made any sort of plan or discussed how we would support our kids’ language growth the way we extensively researched and debated other childrearing topics such as nutrition, discipline, or education. However, during our two years living in Mexico, the kids forgot Japanese faster than I thought possible. I was trying to keep it up through videos, books, and games, but my Japanese was never very good. My husband only occasionally spoke Japanese with them. In addition, we were all busy adapting to life in Mexico, learning Spanish, and welcoming our third child to the family. So, after two years of living in Mexico, the kids’ Japanese speaking ability fell to nearly nothing.

This is a fairly common phenomenon. The book, *Successful Family Language Policy*, admits that “even if both parents are fully committed to raising their children bilingually, the role of context is still crucial and the obstacles are many (Schwartz, & Verschik, 2013, p. 106). Perhaps this seems a dismal start to an article on how to support multilingualism, but I mention it to show the lessons I learned from my failures and to share that I understand what a challenge it is to raise active speakers of more than one language in a monolingual environment. I also understand that my job (University Lecturer) is well-paying enough that buying books, paying tutors, and occasionally purchasing international flights is not out of financial reach. I also understand that English is a very high-status language so I never feel ashamed to speak it in public or around my kids’ teachers and friends. I have read in many articles and heard from friends that their kids, spouses, or even they sometimes feel embarrassed speaking a ML in a monolingual community, for example, speaking Spanish in rural USA or Vietnamese in Japan. In this article, I will attempt to address these issues thoughtfully. I want to share some ideas, plans, and resources so that other parents can learn from my mistakes and succeed with their bilingual or multilingual children.

Creating your Family Language Plan

The first step to raising bilingual children is to have a plan. The best time to start is before the first child is born and more ideally on the first date with a potential parenting partner. It is crucial for both parents to support bilingualism, especially if they are living somewhere monolingual, and especially if one parent speaks only the community language. That parent needs to support their spouse and future children in

becoming “members of their cultural group in part by the way in which their parents interact and use heritage language with them, especially in early childhood” (Schwartz, 2010, p. 175). In a study that focused on the success or disappointments of parents in exogamous marriages attempting to raise their children bilingually in Australia, there were often comments from the ML speaking parent that the Australian parent didn’t want the other parent speaking the ML language so much, that he or she couldn’t understand what was going on, or that the ML speaking parent needed to focus on the community language and learn it better along with the children (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013).

In relationships where the parents speak two different native languages, many couples simply assume that each parent will speak their native language to their children and the children will speak each language with alacrity. One parent might make assumptions about the future that the other parent finds a complete surprise. One parent might balk at the prices for international schools or resist the idea of speaking a second language to their children, but both parents must be supportive of whatever plan is agreed upon. For example, a 2019 study of eight English-Japanese speaking families living in Japan highlights the importance of spousal support. One participant, whose children were only passively bilingual, stated that she didn’t get any English support from her Japanese spouse, and that may have led to their children’s lack of active use of English (Nakamura, 2019). Other parents included in the same study whose children were able to speak English more actively credited some of that success to their Japanese spouses’ support in speaking English with the children, providing media in English and encouraging English in other ways in the household. The same study also stated that the status of English is higher in the Japanese-English bilingual home if both parents speak it (Nakamura, 2019) and this will encourage equal motivation to learn both languages. In my personal experience, I used to get frustrated that my husband didn’t support me enough in our bilingual journey. For instance, he complained at first about the prices of tutors. In addition, I have been the only one to find fun materials to support Spanish practice. I then considered my childhood struggle to learn Spanish over decades of practice, and my eternally low Japanese level, and how these experiences influence me to push the kids to become multilingual while they are still young. In comparison, my husband loves studying new languages, and he cheerfully became fluent in Japanese and Spanish as an adult, which may be why he was not too focused on the children being raised multilingually. After talking through our personal experiences with language learning, we were much better able to understand each other, and we rethought our plan. We compromised and decided on a new family language plan that works for all of us.

During your discussion with your parenting partner, the first decisions to make are who will speak which language, and when and where they will speak them. Many parents simply fall into the One Parent, One Language method (OPOL). OPOL is a very popular method, and simple enough to implement, each parent speaks to the child in a different language, usually the parents’ native language if it is a bilingual marriage. Otherwise, whoever is the most fluent in the language speaks it. However, in this method, it is common for children to “become passive (receptive) rather than active (productive) bilinguals” (King & Fogle, 2006a). Using OPOL, sole responsibility for the minority language’s acquisition rests on one parent’s shoulders and it is simply too much for one person to handle on their own, especially if there is little support for the minority language in the community or at school. It can be more successful if the minority-language-speaking parent is a stay-at-home parent, but quite often these days both parents work and the children attend daycare where only the majority language is spoken. In fact, in OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, an average of “61% of children live in households where all adults are in work” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019, p. 2). It is very difficult for only one working parent to match the community level of language exposure and so the minority language will always be playing catch up. I prefer the Minority Language at Home (MLAH) method. MLAH “is considered the most fail-safe method as children will hear and interact in the language with both parents constantly from birth until they leave the home” (Koning, 2012, p. 51). There are several reasons why I prefer this method, but the two main reasons are that the responsibility for language learning is shared between the parents –making them into a team—and it increases the time spent using the Minority Language. Of course, this is only possible if both parents enthusiastically support bilingualism and have at least some command of the minority language. Notice that fluency is not necessary for both parents. Tips for how the less-fluent parent can participate and support their children will be mentioned below.

When should parents start introducing a second or third language? The ideal time is to start from birth, with both parents committed to participating equally in raising multilingual children. Research has shown that children can begin learning and differentiating between two languages from birth (McCardle & Hoff, 2006). Also, children raised learning two languages from birth acquire the languages in much the same way that monolingual babies learn one language (McCardle & Hoff, 2006) so there's no reason to wait!

I used to teach English at a Japanese University with a native English speaker who had married a Japanese woman and had one son. He regularly relaxed around the teacher's office until late because he wanted to arrive home after the difficult hours of dinner, bath, and bedtime. Then, in nearly the same breath he would bemoan the fact that his four-year-old son couldn't speak English. I hope this isn't you, but if you see any hint of yourself in that story, you must realize that if you want your child to speak your language, you have to commit to putting in the time. You have to be there for the all-night infant scream-a-thons, the terrible twos, the potty-training accidents, and the bedtime battles. Those trying times are delightfully sandwiched in between learning to smile and walk, joyfully running to meet you at the daycare doors and copying your exact colloquialisms that you didn't even know you ever said. (I will never forget the day my two-year-old daughter lifted something heavy and exclaimed sincerely, "Uffda!," a unique exclamation used in some parts of the USA.) These toddler years are prime patience-testing time, but also language explosion time. Although language development can happen at any age, "linguistic scientists consider the period between the ages of 3 and 4 years to be critical" (Meisel, 2007, cited in Akgul et al., 2019, p. 1589). I personally feel that age two is the crucial age for parent language habits to solidify. If you can take a sabbatical or cash in your vacation days for a month trip to somewhere where the ML is spoken in the community, or fly your ML speaking parents or in-laws to your home for an extended visit, age two years old is the time to do it. Not only is it a time of tremendous language growth, but it is such a trying time that parents can be excused for using whatever language works when their child is throwing a tantrum, or refusing to eat, or crying from an injury. It is also so exciting to hear a child use new words that parents can easily slip into using the words they know the child knows. This can be a catch-22 of bolstering the community language at the expense of the minority language. Finally, this time is so important because everything that comes later is easier if you are using the minority language rather than teaching it.

Every child's brain is different, but a common belief is that a third of a child's time should be spent with a language in order to achieve complete competence (Genesee, 2007). If you do the math, you might be surprised how little time each day your kids are getting in the minority language. (I was.) It's not uncommon on weeknights for working parents to see their young children for an hour in the morning and only two or three hours in the evening. If you're that parent, are there any changes you can make? Is it possible to pull back at work? If you must work late every night, can you wake up early and have a leisurely, chatty, family breakfast every morning? Can you work four long days and commit to coming home in time for dinner one day per week? Are you too mentally exhausted when you get home? Take a relaxing walk outside with your kids or mindlessly build block towers for your child to knock down. Are you physically exhausted? Then grab a pile of books and collapse on the couch to read to your kids. Work your kids into your schedule. My oldest child rides her bike next to me when I go jogging. I bring only one child with me to the grocery store in order to get some one-on-one time with him or her. (It's not easy bringing all three kids shopping, but one is quite manageable.) Don't know what to say to your infant? Tell stories, sing your favorite rock hits, or put her in a carrier on your chest, go for a walk, and describe what you see. Don't have time for anything at night except for family dinner and bath? Skip the bath every other night and spend that time reading books to your kids. Make whatever changes necessary to give your kids the time they deserve.

Practical Methods: School, Tutoring, and Lessons at Home

Now that we've discussed planning and time management, it's time to look at practical methods. The most fail-safe way to have bilingual kids is to enroll them in an international or bilingual school or daycare. If the cost is too expensive for 18 years, consider sending your children to only a few years of bilingual elementary school. Even one year will be incredibly helpful, not only in building a foundation in the minority language but in making friends with other minority language speaking kids. I found that once my oldest started attending Japanese elementary school, English and Spanish study time got harder and harder. Her Japanese homework became more important to her than her English reading time or Spanish conversation time. I had to become both creative and a bit strict to ensure her English and Spanish didn't fall behind. It's a big

decision to make, sending your kids to an international school, but a worthwhile thing to consider. A few more comments about when kids start elementary school. It will be much harder and more expensive to take trips to a ML speaking country (or it will make such visits shorter) because parents often want to schedule trips during school holidays, which can be during peak travel season and may be hard to organize with work vacation time. Finally, if you have a child attending elementary school and you have a younger child at home, odds are that the younger one has now aged out of free seating on the plane, making international trips that much more expensive.

Weekend or evening classes in the target language are also helpful if bilingual school is not an option. Not only will the weekend classes provide homework that will keep students working throughout the week, but these types of weekend schools help parents meet other parents raising bilingual children so they can support each other by sharing ideas and resources (Nakamura, 2019). The kids can make friends with other kids sharing their same experiences, and if they can play together in the minority language, that is an incredible benefit.

A third way to support minority languages is to find a tutor. Of course, there are tutoring businesses offering to teach all types of languages in many large cities, but they are often filled with students who have low levels of the target language and can be quite expensive. Here are some suggestions for finding more personalized (and often cheaper) tutors.

1. Go to the language department at any local university. Ask the professors if they have any friends, family, or advanced students that are interested in tutoring. You can also ask around anywhere in the community where you see people speaking the ML, such as international supermarkets, international restaurants, and so forth. Choose a tutor and then try to plan fun activities so the children look forward to tutoring time! The tutor can read books, play board games, bake treats, play at the park, or any variety of activities to expose the children to a variety of vocabulary. Hiring a local person directly to come to your house is often cheaper and more time-efficient than sending your kids to a tutoring company. I have also found that it helps keep me motivated to study with the children in preparation for the tutor's visit. For example, next week, the tutor is going to bake cookies with the kids, so we're reviewing kitchen and measuring vocabulary today.

2. The next logical step from tutors is ML speaking babysitters. I know that employing a sitter or nanny is uncommon in some parts of the world, but I have found using babysitters to be quite beneficial both in supporting the kids' language development, but also for my own mental well-being! I simply transitioned tutoring time into babysitting time after a few months of getting to know our tutor and confirming that he or she could safely handle all three kids. I use the free time to go to my weekly exercise class, go on dates with my husband, or attend work events.

3. If you can't find any people in real life, look online. The following websites offer language exchange practice. The parent who doesn't speak the ML can help someone learn the community language online while the kids (and parent!) practice the ML. These are all free sites and only a portion of the available websites out there.

- a. *Lingoglobe* (<http://www.lingoglobe.com>)
- b. *Tandem* (<https://www.tandem.net>)
- c. *Easy Language Exchange* (<https://www.easylanguageexchange.com>)
- d. *Speaky* (<https://www.speaky.com>)

4. If you have the money, you can simply pay for online tutors. The following websites help you find a reasonably priced tutor.

- a. *Verbal Planet* (<https://www.verbalplanet.com>)
- b. *Italki* (<https://www.italki.com>)
- c. *Wyzant* (<https://www.wyzant.com>)
- d. *Verbling* (<https://www.verbling.com>)

5. Join local meetup groups on social media for people raising bilingual or multilingual kids. Depending on the size of your city, you can specialize in the language you want to focus on. For example, in Osaka, there

is a Spanish meetup group called, *スペイン語パーティー Hablemos en Osaka*. If there isn't a group, create your own. Use this group to arrange shared lessons, play dates, and other meetups, as well as to share ideas and materials such as books and toys. Kids need to be exposed to different accents and idiolects, to see adults communicating in the minority language, and see other kids doing it as well.

6. Whenever relatives from the minority culture ask for gift ideas, provide ideas for gifts that support the minority language. One example is asking the relatives to record themselves reading a book aloud to the child and then give that book as the present. The child can listen and follow along in the ML dozens of times. Not only it is a great way to encourage children to feel closer to their extended family, but it's great for their language development. There are also lots of free printable books available online. You could print a few books off yourself and share the link with your family member and ask them to record themselves on their smartphone reading the story aloud. Then, you can play it while you help the kids turn the pages in time. Yet another option would be to ask your family member to check out books from their local library and video record themselves reading it and showing the pictures.

7. It has been mentioned before and needs to be emphasized again. If there is a parent that speaks only the community language, then that parent needs to get involved in helping the kids learn the ML. That parent must sit in on the tutoring session, sing along to the ML songs in the car, instigate calls to the in-laws to speak the ML, and mention often how much they enjoy hearing the kids speak the ML.

8. Finally, consistent *Skype*, *FaceTime*, or *Zoom* calls are great ways to improve language abilities. With young children, it's better to keep these short and sweet. Have the kids prepare something they are going to show their aunts or cousins, make the call, show the homework or picture, chat for a few minutes, and hang up. It's better to make frequent, short calls rather than longer, boring calls. If the time zones cause problems, consider sending short videos back and forth. For instance, take two minutes to video record what you're eating for dinner (describing each dish and how it's cooked and how much each kid likes it), and send it to cousins. Then, request a similar video in reply. If you are having a hard time getting family to interact in this way, but your kids enjoy making the videos, consider contacting an elementary school that uses the minority language and asking if any of the teachers are interested in having their class become videos pen-pals (or writing pen-pals!) with your kids.

Practical Methods: Fun as a Family

Outside of official school and tutoring time, or arranged meetups, think of anything you can do to keep the target language in your household and in your kids' minds. Your home and car should be a little minority language bubble that reminds everyone to start speaking the target language as soon as they enter.

1. Encourage your children to speak the ML to each other, at least around you and at home. If you have a new baby, explain to the older child that the new baby only understands the ML and model talking with and playing with the baby in the ML. Teach the older child songs that they can then teach the baby. Ask the older children to read books to the younger child or tell stories. In *Successful Family Language Policy*, researchers found that "the presence of an older child with whom the mother can continue to use her L1 seems to be a crucial factor in how successful she is in continuing to use it in the home, not only with the older child, but also with younger siblings that follow (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013). In another study focusing on Spanish and English bilingual students in the USA, Duursma et al. (2007) found that "the language preferred for interaction with siblings had a much larger effect on English proficiency than the language preferred by the parents" (p. 185).

2. Buy a cookbook in your language in order to have weekly minority culture cooking nights. Depending on the kids' age, you could ask them to read the recipe to you, help with measuring, getting the right ingredients from the fridge, or simply washing vegetables. I sometimes rewrite the recipe in easy English so that my oldest is able to read it while we're cooking.

3. Change any electronic device settings (Alexa, tablets, car GPS, social media, etc.) to the minority language.

4. Keep the default Netflix/YouTube/etc. account in the minority language. Only allow movies and TV in the minority language. Then spend time talking about the show and movie as well. If one parent isn't very

confident in their minority language skills, help them practice asking lots of open-ended questions to encourage the kids to talk more. *I don't understand what's happening! Can you explain it to me? What was your favorite part? What happened at the end? Who was your favorite character? Why do you like this show? What do you think happened after the movie ended?* These few sentences can be used again and again no matter what the show is. Be careful, though! TV should be considered a minor support for learning a language, and should never take time away from real communication and interaction (King & Fogle, 2006b).

5. The music in the car should always be in the minority language. Choose songs that the kids like and encourage everyone to sing along. We like to have 15-minute family karaoke night a few times a month using just the computer and YouTube. Spend each December learning how to sing a holiday song in the ML as a family.

6. Once the kids are old enough to start reading and writing, take the first day of each month to label everything in one room in the house in the target language. You might be surprised which words the kids don't know, for example, *faucet, cupboard, or outlet*. On the final day of each month, take the labels down and use them as flashcards.

7. Find podcasts your kids like. These are great for long car rides or to listen to at night before they fall asleep. The following is just one example of many lists of English podcasts: <https://www.weareteachers.com/best-podcasts-for-kids/>. This list includes summaries, so you can choose the podcast that is right for your kids' ages, interests, and language level. (These are all for English speakers, but there are thousands of podcasts in many different languages.)

8. Get board games such as *Catch Phrase, The Resistance, Anomia, and Loaded Questions* for older kids. Younger kids will like cooperative games such as *Hoot Owl Hoot* or *Busy Town*. *Story Cubes* is fun for all ages. These games require lots of communication. Avoid games like *Scrabble, Monopoly, or Checkers* where much of the game is spent silently taking turns. Bring these games to the multilingual meetup, have your kids play these games with tutors, or schedule a weekly family game night.

9. Leave books lying around on coffee tables and desks. Pick one up and start reading it and you will find your kids dropping whatever they are doing to sit on your lap and join you. If you are having a hard time finding books in the minority language, look online for free printable books. Ask around and trade books with other parents. Visit thrift stores on your next visit to the minority language speaking country and bring back a carry-on suitcase full of cheap, gently-used books.

10. Don't forget about teaching literacy! I recommend the book, *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons* by Engleman et al. (1986), to teach English reading. This is a great way for parents who are less fluent to become more involved because it states the exact words and gestures the parent must do in order to teach the child to read. There's no guesswork, teaching knowledge, or advanced English ability required. (An untrained teenage tutor would be able to teach using this book.) I prefer to wait until kids are a bit older, around five or six years old to begin teaching reading, but there are strong arguments for starting earlier. One of which is that whichever language is learned first may forever be branded as the "easy" language and become the preferred language for reading!

11. Once your children can read, utilize this ability! Our oldest child (eight years old) can now read to the youngest (three years old) while I do the six-year-old's reading lesson. I help the kids write letters to their cousins. I give the kids notes with a clue to where their afternoon snack is hidden. I try to make reading part of everyday life—not just something we do sitting at the kitchen table during the reading lesson.

Final Tips

After you've been using these tips and tricks to increase exposure and usage of the minority language, you'll need to periodically step back and analyze the results. How are the kids' attitudes towards the minority language? How is their level? It doesn't hurt to ask a neutral third party to judge their language skills or look up guidelines for language ability according to age. In an article about family language policy, the author mentions a number of studies that show parents are poor judges of their own children's language skills. It states that the parents' "perception is based on their beliefs rather than observation" (Spolsky, 2012, p. 6). I confess to being guilty of the same inflated perception of my children's language ability. I

asked a colleague to give my kids a verbal Spanish test after two years of living in Mexico and was very deflated when they did not receive native-level scores for their age.

No matter how you choose to proceed, keep your and your family's stress level under consideration. Are there any upcoming scheduling conflicts? How are finances? Don't be afraid to thoughtfully modify your plan. Just keep yourself from doing it in a moment of frustration or exhaustion. One night I was angry because my son was refusing to speak Spanish with the Spanish tutor. I was cooking dinner in the other room as they studied. I could hear him refusing to respond in Spanish and being incredibly naughty. I had had a long day at work and had used my lunch break to plan this "fun" lesson that he was refusing to participate in. I decided to cancel all future lessons. They were a waste of time and money. However, I didn't say anything in the moment except taking my son aside and warning him that his after-dinner treat was on the line if he didn't shape up. (He improved slightly.) Later that night, we were reading Spanish books and my son spontaneously asked a few questions in quite good Spanish. Thankfully, I hadn't canceled the lessons on the spot! I realized that he was absorbing the language, even if he was behaving badly during that particular lesson. Another time, the kids pouted and complained as we played a game in Spanish. They just wanted to use English; it was too hard to keep using Spanish. However, I persisted, and the second time it went more smoothly and the third time better yet. Don't give up if things get hard. Try something at least three times before you decide it's not right for your kids.

Regularly come together as a family—yes, kids too—and remember *why* you're studying this language. What are your future goals? What's difficult and how can we overcome it together? What would you like to focus on in the next few months? Are there any new books, podcasts, games, or study techniques you'd like to try? What do you like about speaking another language? Is there any special reward we can give ourselves for all our hard work? This will help keep motivation high.

If language learning is going poorly, there are two extreme responses that you might need to consider. First, if your child has reached adolescence and your relationship with that child is suffering, and they hate the ML study time, or they refuse to speak the ML unprompted, consider giving it a rest indefinitely. The most important part of raising kids is the loving relationship between you, and if language study becomes a constant battle or a cause of resentment, this can cause significant damage to the parent-child relationship. Remember, your child may well decide to study and learn their heritage language at any time in their life, and a strong, loving bond with you is one of the best ways to keep that option open.

Secondly, consider spending a significant amount of time in a place where the ML is spoken widely and even enrolling your kids in school there. A colleague of mine who is raising her kids in Japan travels back to the USA for 4-5 weeks every year during Japanese school holidays. First, she enrolled the kids in a local daycare in the states and as they grew up, she enrolled them in the local school as Japanese and American school holidays are at different times. This has required a lot of advance notice, financial planning, and paperwork, but it has been a consistently positive experience for her balanced bilingual kids.

Finally, I want to leave you with one more anecdote about my kids' language skills. Remember when we lived in Mexico for two years and the kids seemed to have completely forgotten Japanese? When we moved back to Japan, the kids picked up Japanese amazingly fast. It had hidden itself away, but it came out and blossomed as soon as we came back. After two years of sparse usage, the kids were age-level fluent again in less than six months—their teachers' opinions, not mine! If you feel discouraged that your kids' language ability isn't where you want it to be, don't give up. Keep working, keep talking, keep spending time with them, and trust that their little brains are soaking it up. Good luck on your multilingual journey.

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