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“But it doesn't really have to do with bilingualism”: Family language policies in transnational families of bilingual autistic children

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Abstract:

Family language policy (FLP) framework investigates how both societal and individual ideologies, practices, and maintenance strategies shape families' language choices and behaviours. With the growing number of autistic children exposed to bilingual environments, it is becoming vital to complement the existing body of FLP research with studies on speaking and non-speaking autistic children from transnational families. This study uses a mixed methodology, including an online parental questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with parents, to determine which language and modality policies and practices are currently prevalent in families with bilingual autistic children. It also investigates whether Spolsky's FLP tripartite model (2004) is sufficient for describing lived experiences of families with bilingual autistic children, especially in the case of non-speaking or minimally speaking autistic children who require a significant amount of additional support. I investigate how these lived experiences influence parental beliefs about bilingualism, additional language learning, and hopes about future using interview data from eight transnational families with autistic children. The results show that most parents share positive attitudes towards their children's bilingualism. While receiving a lot of contradictory advice from health and educational practitioners, they tend to choose professional advice favouring bilingualism in their daily language practices. However, spoken language is vastly preferred over alternative modes of communication. The findings also suggest that the existing FLP framework is adequate for large quantitative studies of bilingual autistic children, but not for a more detailed analysis of the participants' language successes and challenges. I advocate for an intersectional framework that incorporates critical FLP, neurodiversity, and social class.

Anna Metreveli is a linguist and a student at the Master's Programme in Language Science with a Specialisation in Bilingualism at Stockholm University. The scope of her research interests is sociolinguistics, computational sociolinguistics, and bilingual education. Anna is particularly interested in language development in bilingual autistic children, translanguaging in neurodiverse bilingual classrooms, and discourse analysis.

*[Please fill out this form to register](#) for this talk and to receive the Zoom link closer to the presentation dates. For more information, please contact John Wayne N. dela Cruz (john.delacruz@mail.mcgill.ca, Organizer) or Lana Zeaiter (lane.zeaiter@mail.mcgill.ca, Zoom Host). The Plurilingual Lab Graduate Talks is hosted by McGill University's Faculty of Education. This event is not video recorded.