

A Model for Language Intervention: Toys & Picture-Books as Early Pedagogical Props for the Transmission of Lazuri

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Abstract : Oral languages are destined to disappear rapidly in the absence of interventions aimed at encouraging their usage by young children. The seminal language preservation model proposed by Fishman (1991) stresses the importance of multiple generations using the endangered L1 while engaged in daily routines with younger children. Over the last two decades Fishman (2001) has used his intergenerational transmission model in documenting the revitalization of Basque languages, providing evidence that families are transmitting Euskara as a first language to their children with success. In our study, to motivate usage of Lazuri, we asked caregivers to speak the language while engaged with their toddlers (12 to 48 months) in semi-structured play, and included both parents (N=32) and grandparents (N=30) as play partners. This unnatural prompting to speak only in Lazuri was greeted with reluctance, as 90% of our families indicated that they had stopped using Lazuri with their children. Nevertheless, caregivers followed instructions and produced 67% of their utterances in Lazuri, with another 14% of utterances using a combination of Lazuri and Turkish (Codeswitch). Although children spoke mostly in Turkish (83% of utterances), frequencies of caregiver utterances in Lazuri or Codeswitch predicted the extent to which their children used the minority language in return. This trend suggests that home interventions aimed at encouraging dyads to communicate in a non-preferred, endangered language can effectively increase children's usage of the language. Alternatively, this result suggests that any use of the minority language on the part of the children will promote its further usage by caregivers. For researchers examining links between play, culture, and child development, structured play has emerged as a critical methodology (e.g., Frost, Wortham, Reifel, 2007, Lilliard et al., 2012; Sutton-Smith, 1986; Gaskins & Miller, 2009), allowing investigation of cultural and individual variation in parenting styles, as well as the role of culture in constraining the affordances of toys. Toy props, as well as picture-books in native languages, can be used as tools in the transmission and preservation of endangered languages by allowing children to explore adult roles through enactment of social routines and conversational patterns modeled by caregivers. Through adult-guided play children not only acquire scripts for culturally significant activities, but also develop skills in expressing themselves in culturally relevant ways that may continue to develop over their lives through community engagement. Further pedagogical tools, such as language games and e-learning, will be discussed in this proposed oral talk.

Keywords : language intervention, pedagogical tools, endangered languages, Lazuri

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