"Tengo que habla español. Yo no entiendo ingles!":
A qualitative case study on a bilingual child with Autism Spectrum Conditions

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Language differences in children with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) often lead professionals to believe that children with ASC cannot or should not become bilingual, thus advising parents with a child with ASC raised in a bilingual household to adhere to English only. Emerging studies, however, attest that children with ASC can become bilingual, and that there are no language differences between bilingual and monolingual children with ASC. Although these findings are promising, very few studies investigated external factors, such as cultural expectations, school practices and other pertinent factors involved in raising and educating children with ASC bilingually. Drawing from video-and audio-taped data from spontaneous interactions among family members, interviews and field notes, this qualitative case study describes one family's cultural beliefs and practices that influenced raising their child with ASC bilingually. Implications for educators and other professionals are also described.

Keywords: ASC, bilingualism, culture, social model of disability, parents

Ever since Kanner (1943) reported 11 children "whose condition differs so markedly and uniquely from anything reported so far" (p. 217), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)[1] have been considered as a pathological flaw that resides within the individual, as these children "have come into the world with innate inability to form the usual, biologically provided affective contact with people" (p. 250). In the similar vein, the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), since its first edition, has addressed evolving diagnostic criteria for ASD, based on its deficits and differences from those without ASD.

Currently, the latest version of DSM-5 (2013) reads that in order to have an ASD diagnosis, children must display persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across contexts, such as deficits in social-emotional reciprocity; ranging from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back and forth conversation through reduced sharing of interests, emotions, and affect and response to total lack of initiation of social interaction (A1). Additionally, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), defines ASD as below:

A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. [IDEIA Part 300/A/300.8/c/1/I, 2004]

Whereas Kanner (1943), DSM-5 (2013), and IDEIA (2004), grounded in the medical model of disability, conceptualize ASD as a deficit in a person that needs to be fixed, the social model of disability posits that disability is a social construct, and that it is the social context that makes weaknesses, deficits or impairments more prominent (Stainback et al., 1989). Baglieri and Shapiro (2012) contend that it is the "culture and societal structures that impact a person's experience of an impairment to position him or her as disabled" (p. 29). Similarly, Disability Studies in Education (DSE), a discipline within the broader framework of the social model of disability, "contextualizes disability within political and social spheres," to provide "a counterbalance to the deficit-based understanding of disability that permeates education as how we choose to respond to disability shifts significantly depending upon whether we perceive that something is 'wrong' with disabled people or something is 'wrong' with a social system that disables people" (Valle & Connor, 2011, p. xi).

Major premises that separate the medical model of disability from the social model of disability perspective may be that the latter examines disability in social and cultural context, and that it does not believe in a dichotomy between the normal and the abnormal. Similarly, when DSM portrays a child with ASD in need of being fixed through a cure/care intervention (Finkelstein, 2003), DSE rejects deficit models of disability, presumes competence, and promotes inclusive, accessible schools for students with a disability label (Connor et al., 2008). The following research findings illustrate more in detail how differing perspectives lead research methodologies, yielding different research outcomes.

ASD, Language, and Bilingualism

Children with ASD often never babble or babble later than those without ASD, and very few children with autism seem to babble at the same time as other children without ASD do (Kim, 2008; Konstantareas, 1993; Oller, 2000). Wing (1981) further suggests, based on case histories of children and adults with Asperger syndrome, that babbling may have been limited in quantity and quality because of the lack of desire to babble, gesture, move, smile, laugh and eventually speak.

Additionally, children with ASD tend to show more severe impairments in the area of pragmatics than any other language areas. For instance, children with ASD typically do not develop communicative behaviors such as gaze, vocal and gaze signaling, play, and social behaviors. School-aged children and adolescents with ASD also tend to show impairments in empathy, joint attention, pretend play, and imitation, which are linked to the impairments in social understanding and reciprocal social communication (Baron-Cohen, 1993; Leslie, 1987; Mundy et al., 1993).

While existing research studies have heavily focused on the deficit aspects of ASD, emerging studies pose different questions, such as bilingualism in children with ASD. Petersen (2010), for instance, compared monolingual preschool children with ASD with bilingual children with ASD and found no group differences in English words. The latter group showed higher comprehension scores and higher language

scores on Communication Development Inventories (Fenson et al., 1993). Similarly, Hambley and Fombonne (2012) compared children with ASD raised in a bilingual environment to those from monolingual environments and found no group differences in the language levels. Seung, Siddiqi and Elder (2006) report results from a case study with a 3-year-old Korean-American boy with ASD. The bilingual speech-language intervention both in English and Korean started when the child was 3 years 6 months. For the first 12 months speech-language intervention was delivered mainly in Korean, followed by the gradual intervention in English for the next 6 months and then entirely in English for another 6 months. At the 24-month follow-up, the child successfully responded to testing in English. Seung, Siddiqi and Elder concluded that providing culturally sensitive intervention in the child's native language was essential for the child's overall development.

As these emerging study findings attest, children with ASD can be raised bilingually, just like any other children raised in a bilingual household. Only when we question and challenge our existing assumptions and beliefs about ASD, do we begin to realize the social and educational contexts that disable or able people with ASD and vice versa. The dominant social and educational systems, such as DSM and IDEA, have continuously pathologized ASD as a deficit in the individual, preventing other perspectives to be considered. To suggest a shift in paradigm and cultivate an environment that ables people, Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) are to be used over Autism Spectrum Disorders henceforth throughout the paper.

The present study, given the emerging data that there are no differences in language between monolingual and bilingual children with ASC, intends to examine the social and cultural contexts that able children with ASC. Rather than examining the individual with ASC as the sole unit of analysis, this study investigates the external social, cultural factors and contexts that help raise children with ASC bilingually. Through examining these external social and cultural factors, this study aims at better understanding family members with a child with ASC from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, at broadening perspectives of educators in school settings to better serve diverse students in the 21st century classrooms, and at cultivating learning environments where bilingual children with ASC are empowered to fully become a contributing member of the classroom.

In order to examine these factors, spontaneous interactions of family members with their child with ASC were video-and audio-taped, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and field notes were collected from various settings in the child's school.

Methods
Participants
A local preschool was contacted in order to recruit potential participants. Children were included if they met the following inclusion criteria: 1) have a diagnosis of autism; 2) are exposed to two different languages on a daily basis; 3) do not have any other disability or hearing problems, and 4) are verbal—operationally defined as having at least 50 expressive words. One child, named Adam[2], was selected and included based on the inclusion criteria. Afterwards, Adam's parents were contacted for their participation in the study.

Data Collection and Analyses
A semi-structured interview was conducted with the participant's mother at her home for approximately one hour in the winter of 2008. During the interview, a range of topics were covered, from Adam's diagnosis, school histories, language preferences at home and other pertinent information. The interview was

tape recorded and then transcribed.

To collect spontaneous language samples, three unstructured sessions with varying interlocutors were video-and audio-taped for 20 minutes at three different time points over 15 months. The first session was recorded when Adam, at the age of 5 years and 7 months, was playing with his friend, Kevin, at Adam's house. The second session was done when Adam was 5 years and 11 months old while he was playing with his sister and his mother at home. The third one was video-recorded a year later when Adam was 6 years and 11 months old while Adam interacted mainly with his father at home. Once recording was complete, all the data were transcribed using MacWhinney transcription methods[3] (2000). To triangulate the data further, field notes were obtained by observing Adam in his classroom and by sitting in his Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting. All the data were transcribed, coded, and categorized into contributing factors.

Findings

Interview with the Mother

Interview with Adam's mother, Lisette, revealed several important social and cultural factors that influenced her to raise all her children bilingually. The first factor was the family's faithful commitment to maintaining their native language for their children. The second factor was Lisette's involvement in Adam's education, such as requesting a bilingual teacher for Adam.

Commitment to maintaining Spanish

Adam, born to a Peruvian mother and a Mexican father in 2003 in the United States, has been exposed to Spanish as his primary language since birth. Lisette is extremely committed to maintaining a Spanish-speaking household. She shared that her mother encouraged her to speak only Spanish at home. She also mentioned her high school guidance counselor who recommended her to remain bilingual. She has been practicing the same

rules for her own children. Lisette states:

Author: So at home, you don't speak any English unless…

Lisette: Unless it's homework related…because I didn't want him [Adam] to be evaluated, and then they say no, so I try to mix it a lot. So like, somebody told me, say banana, and then say it in Spanish. Even with Jane, because I know children, like, that when moms only speak only Spanish at home and when they go to school they enter ESL…and sometimes, because I think, for this country, ESL can be a lower education. I don't know if that's kinda fair, but it really is, because they do not do the same academics. So I try to do banana, apple, you know, the basics for kindergarten and first grade so when they go she [Jane] doesn't have to go to ESL. I was very lucky that she didn't.

In addition to the commitment to raising her children as bilingual, Lisette has been working with her children on their English at home so that her children would not be identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). It was her experience as a student and a parent in the United States that ELLs were not held to high expectations as their peers who are not labeled ELLs. Thus, Lisette continues to expose her children equally to English and Spanish except summer months when children are exposed solely to Spanish. Lisette stated that although she sometimes "gets scared" that Jane, her daughter, will "fall behind academics" due to Spanish-only rule during summer months at home, Jane has not fallen behind but "read above her grade level."

Involvement in Adam's Education

When Adam began attending a local preschool, Lisette requested a bilingual teacher for Adam for a smooth transition from early intervention services to the preschool. She knew that she needed to ask

for services since "schools do not do it freely," and "they don't just come to you." A bilingual Peruvian paraprofessional was employed at that time at Adam's school, and she worked with Adam for two years. Lisette still feels grateful that there was a bilingual paraprofessional at his school, who helped Adam transition well to a new setting by sharing the same language.

Lisette: I asked somebody to make sure they have a bilingual person in case he needed that help. I was very lucky that they had a paraprofessional; she's a Peruvian lady. I was very blessed that she was there and that she would say some words and she was with Adam for two years, so I think that was a big help because he would say like umm pollo, and that's a Peruvian thing for sure, but nobody would understand but her.

Field Notes

Observing Adam in his school also revealed several other contributing factors. The first factor was that there was no one who imposed dominant beliefs on Adam, such as demanding only one language for Adam. His classroom teacher, certified both in general and special education, worked with a bilingual paraprofessional, creating a safe, welcoming and structured classroom environment where Adam felt fully belonged. The second factor lay with the fact that professional at Adam's school personnel truly collaborated with Lisette, as evidenced at an Individualized Education Planning (IEP) meeting.

Being a Member of an Inclusive Classroom

There were 14 students, one teacher and one paraprofessional in an inclusive preschool classroom. The children were seated in a semi-circle with their teacher. Adam was sitting next to his friend, Kevin, who also happened to have ASC, and both of them were very attentive during the instruction, evidenced by sharing answers to the teacher's questions. Then it was snack time and free play. During the snack time, Adam and Kevin were seated separately from each other; however, Adam talked to Kevin when given a snack and vice versa, rather than talking to neighbors in proximity. For instance, when the teacher gave Adam a cookie, Adam said, "Kevin, I get a cookie!" In response, Kevin yelled out, "I got Gold Fish!"

After the snack, it was free play time when Adam played toys with other children. Shortly after that, he moved onto blocks and started making something with them. He brought what he had made and showed it to his teacher, saying "A robot!" Kevin, on the other hand, had no direct interaction with his peers, but banged his head very gently against the rug on the floor. He then held a toy and started banging the toy on the table very softly and repeatedly, which seemed soothing to him. The two adults in the classroom were very observant of Kevin's actions, and let Kevin enjoy rhythm and movements by himself. Later, the teacher shared that Kevin is academically stronger than Adam, and Adam is more social than Kevin. She also reported that Kevin has more behavior problems than Adam, and that both Adam and Kevin have difficulties with less structured time, such as free play.

Nonetheless, it was apparent that Adam felt safe in his classroom by the way he interacted with his peers and teacher, and vice versa. Everyone in the classroom seemed to have accepted Adam as well as Kevin as who they are, not as who they should be.

Collaboration with Professionals at Adam's school

Adam's IEP meeting was held a few days after his classroom observation. The school psychologist began reporting Adam's progress. She stated that Adam had difficulties with the initiation of conversations, and did not engage in imaginative, pretend play. She also reported the test results from the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-

III (Wechsler, 2002), in which Adam showed weak reasoning skills and stronger receptive language skills than his expressive language skills. She stated that during testing, Adam "was not with me," which implies that Adam could have cooperated and engaged in the given test but chose not to do so with her.

The occupational therapist then shared Adam's progress in fine and gross motor skills. She felt that Adam had made tremendous progress since the beginning of the school year. She further mentioned that "Adam is on when he is on," meaning that Adam concentrated on the given tasks only when the task was what he prefers, and that she had to give him frequent movement breaks to keep him engaged during testing or OT sessions. Next, the speech pathologist shared Adam's progress. She began her reports by sharing that there is a discrepancy between weekly speech sessions and testing situations. On the vocabulary test, Adam showed a moderate delay. However, when asked to give definitions of specific words, he could not complete the task. One example she shared was that when asked what a cloud is, Adam responded "outside." He was able to associate words with artifacts, and yet he was unable to explain or retell. The speech pathologist further reported that he was able to follow two-step instructions, but when instructions became more complicated, he became agitated. Nonetheless, his knowledge of vocabulary had increased, and he was able to comment, initiate, ask questions, and follow directions better. In addition, she reported that Adam had a hard time answering questions, such as "What did you have lunch?" Lisette interrupted by saying that Adam responds better when given choices. For instance, Lisette stated that he answers better when the question is specifically framed, such as "Did you have chicken or pizza for lunch?" rather than open-ended questions.

Lastly, Adam's classroom teacher reported the results of the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001), in which Adam scored 3 years and 6 months for his oral language. Other academic areas and mathematical skills were within the expected range for his grade level. She further stated that he had a hard time with comprehension questions and with story recalling.

When the IEP meeting was about to adjourn with recommended services, the principal asked Lisette, "What would he benefit from?" Lisette suggested a few more strengths-based strategies. The meeting was adjourned within an hour.

Observations

Adam was observed in three different natural settings, which generated important factors. The first factor was the consistent exposure to Spanish, as shown in all excerpts below. Particularly, Adam's father, Pedro's persistence with Spanish was quite noticeable when Pedro tirelessly corrected mistakes, filled missing words in for Adam, and encouraged Adam to speak Spanish. The second factor was having a close relationship with bilingual family members, who effortlessly created a Spanish-rich home environment. The third factor was having daily routines with his parents, such as reciting prayers and numbers in Spanish, which family members used to connect with one another.

First observation: Play date with Kevin English only between Adam and Kevin

The following excerpt, Example 1.1, is from Adam and Kevin's play date at Adam's home, while playing a board game. Lisette and Kevin's mother sit next to each other, conversing in Spanish, whereas Adam and Kevin converse only in English.

Example 1.1. English only between Adam and Kevin
1. Kevin: Stop it, Adam!
2. Adam: Two.
3. Kevin: It's your turn.
4. Kevin: Let me help.

%com[3]: Kevin tries to help Adam spinning the wheel.

5. Adam: Hey, hey! No! I got one.
%com: Adam finally gets one score.

6. Adam: Ow!
%act[3]: Adam bumps into Kevin.

7. Kevin: Sorry.

In the above excerpt, Kevin offers help when Adam gets frustrated with the wheel spinning, but Adam insists doing it himself. While playing, they bump into each other. Kevin apologizes to Adam. When Kevin finishes the first round, he yells out of joy, "Ms. Lisette, I did it!" Then Adam passes gas, and Kevin hears it. Kevin looks at Adam and responds in English (#9) to his mother's question in Spanish (#8).

Example 1.2. Passing Gas

8. Kevin's mom: Eww...¿quién está haciendo eso?
Who is doing that?

9. Kevin: Eww...Blame it on Adam.
%com[3]: Kevin points to Adam looking at his mom.

10. Adam: Excuse me!

11. Lisette: That's okay.

12. Lisette: Que feo papi.
That's ugly, it's not nice.

13. Lisette: It's just passing gas.

Second observation: Puzzle Play with Jane

The Example 2.1 is while Adam is playing a puzzle with his sister, Jane, when Adam was 5 years and 11 months old. The second observation revealed that spending time with his bilingual sister and mother gave Adam ample opportunities to practice his Spanish.

Example 2.1. Puzzle Play with Jane

14. Lisette: ¿Qué pasó?
What happened?

15. Adam: ¿las llaves van aquí?
The keys go here?

16. Lisette: Sí, las llaves van allá (.)[3]

The Example 2.2 is where Adam becomes annoyed by his mother's constant interruption, and asks her to leave, or go to bed (#20) so that he can finish the puzzle with his sister.

Example 2.2. Puzzle Play with Jane

17. Lisette: No, ese no va ahí.
No that one doesn't go there.

18. Jane: Adam, no. Adam, no.

19. Lisette: A ver (.) ¿cuál otro?
Let's see. Which other?

20. Adam: Mami,¡ para dormir!
Mom, go to bed!

21. Adam: You stop! mami, that's not (.) [+ eng][3]

A few minutes later Lisette comes back to the scene and tries to be part of the puzzle play with her children.

Example 2.3. Puzzle Play

22. Lisette: Mira, aquí hay vacas, ahí hay más partes de la vaca.
Look, there are cows here. There are more parts of the cow here.

23. Jane: ¡vaca!
Cow!

24. Adam: Esta no es vaca.
This one isn't cow.

25. Lisette: Sí, ¡es vaca!
Yes, it's cow.

26. Adam: Eso no es vaca (.) no va aquí (.) ¿mami?
That one is not cow. It doesn't go here, mom?

Third observation: Missing Tooth

Adam was observed a year later at his home. In this observation, Adam's father, Pedro, kept encouraging Adam to speak only in Spanish especially with his father. The entire observation occurred after Adam finished his daily ritual: counting numbers up to 100 in Spanish and reciting prayers in Spanish before his parents. The Example 3.1 is the excerpt from Adam's interaction with his father and mother about Adam's falling out tooth.

Example 3.1. Missing Tooth

27. Pedro: ¿Qué paso?
What happened?

28. Adam: The teeth came out. [+ eng]

29. Lisette: No te entiendo.
I don't understand.

30. Pedro: No te entiendo.
I don't understand.

31. Adam: The teeth came out. [+ eng]

32. Lisette: El diente salió.
The tooth came out.

33. Adam: El diente salió.
The tooth came out.

34. Pedro: ¿Dónde está tu diente?
Where is the tooth?

35. Adam: Aquí.
Here.

In this example, Adam shows his missing tooth, but his parents respond that they do not understand what Adam means by "The teeth came out." In this instance, Pedro says so because he does not understand what Adams is saying in English, as he wants Adam to speak Spanish. Lisette says she does not understand Adam because Adam lost only one tooth, not multiple teeth. Lisette corrects Adam's error in Spanish, "*El diente salió* (The tooth came out)." Pedro asks Adam more questions, filling in and clarifying information as illustrated in Example 3.2.

Example 3.2. Washing up Before Bed

36. Lisette: Aquí (.) ven aca.
Here…come here.

37. Pedro: Aquí (.) alla en tu silla.
Here…there on your chair.
%act[3]: Adam sits on the end table.

38. Pedro: ¿Qué vas hacer?
What are you going to do?

39. Adam: ummm (.) nada (.) de (.) a dormir.
ummm…nothing…of…to sleep.

40. Pedro: ¿Después?

Later?

41. Adam: ummm (...) xxx

42. Lisette: ¿Vas a lavarte los (.)?
Are you going to brush your?

43. Adam: dientes.
teeth.

44. Lisette: ¿Y te vas a lavar la cara?
And are you going to wash your face?

45. Adam: Cara.
Face.

46. Lisette: ¿Adónde vas a ir mañana?
Mira a papi.
Where are you going tomorrow?
Look at daddy.

In the above example, Lisette checks whether Adam remembers the word, *dientes* (teeth) by asking him *¿Vas a lavarte los?* (Are you going to brush your), providing him with another opportunity to practice the word, *dientes*.

Pedro continues asking questions to Adam, and Lisette asks Adam to look at his father while talking, which helps Adam practice his social skills. Then Adam stumbles on words; however, Pedro is persistent, filling in and/or clarifying information while conversing with Adam. As the conversation does not flow, Pedro changes the subject as in Example 3.3. In this excerpt, Pedro asks Adam about his school lunch. As Adam names food items in English, Pedro translates each word in Spanish, such as milk to *leche*, and apple to *manzana*.

Example 3.3. Snack

47. Pedro: ¿Qué comistes?
What did you eat?

48. Adam: ummm (...) ummm (...) hamburguesa.
Hamburger.

49. Pedro: ¿Hamburguesa?

50. Adam: y vanilla milk.

51. Pedro: ¿Sí?
Yes?

52. Adam: Sí.

53. Pedro: y leche (.)

and milk…
54. Pedro: leche (.)
55. Adam: vanilla milk.
56. Pedro: leche de vainilla
57. Adam: Umhum.
58. Pedro: Y, ¿qué más?
   and what else?
59. Adam: Apple juice.
60. Lisette: manzana
   Apple
61. Pedro: jugo (.)
62. Adam: jugo manzana
   Apple juice

A few minutes later as shown in Example 3.4., Pedro asks Adam a question in Spanish. When Adam responds in English (#64), Pedro says the equivalent phrase in Spanish, *Tengo que* (#65), followed by *habla español … yo no entiendo ingles* (#65. "Speak in Spanish. I don't understand English."). Upon his father's request, Adam switches to Spanish (#66) and continues to do so.

Example 3.4. Yo no entiendo inglés.
63. Pedro: ¿Dónde estás?
   Where are you?
64. Adam: I have to...
65. Pedro: Tengo que (.) habla español (.) yo no entiendo ingles.
   I have to…speak in Spanish…I don't understand English.
66. Adam: Tengo 'de' lavar los dientes.
   I need to brush my teeth.
67. Pedro: ¿Sí? ¿Adónde?
   Really? Where?
68. Adam: En el baño.
   In the bathroom

Summary of Spontaneous Language Data

Language data with different interlocutors generated interesting results. The first observation, during a play date between Adam and Kevin, revealed that whereas Adam switched between English and Spanish, depending on the interlocutors, Kevin responded only in Spanish, although he understood what was said in Spanish. More importantly, Adam and Kevin had a great time playing together, sharing their joy, excitement, and frustration with each other. Contrary to their teacher's observation that Adam and Kevin have difficulties during unstructured play time, they both enjoyed each other's company, coming up with what they wanted to play. The second observation showed how Lisette created a fun environment for her children to practice Spanish. The third observation, mostly with Pedro, revealed his tireless efforts to encourage his son to practice Spanish. By spending time together with his loved ones, Adam was learning not only to become a fluent bilingual, but to grow up to be a competent member of the society.

As shown in Figure 1, Adam conversed more in English (69%) than in Spanish (27%) during the first observation. During the third observation, he spoke considerably more Spanish (63%) than English (29%) as he was talking mostly with his father who is not as fluent in English as his mother or sister. Pedro's continuous attempts to converse in Spanish with Adam, filling in and clarifying information, helped Adam engaged more in Spanish than in English. Adam also used more mixed utterances, operationally defined as language mixes of any content or function words, while interacting with his father. It may be attributed to the fact that they were talking about school related topics where Adam has learned to interact mostly in English. Adam indeed chose languages depending on the context and the interlocutors just like any other bilingual children, which is consistent with existing findings that bilingual children choose language, based on the language of the interlocutor and the context (Arias & Lashmannan, 2005).

Figure 1.
Percentage of English, Spanish, and Mixed Utterances
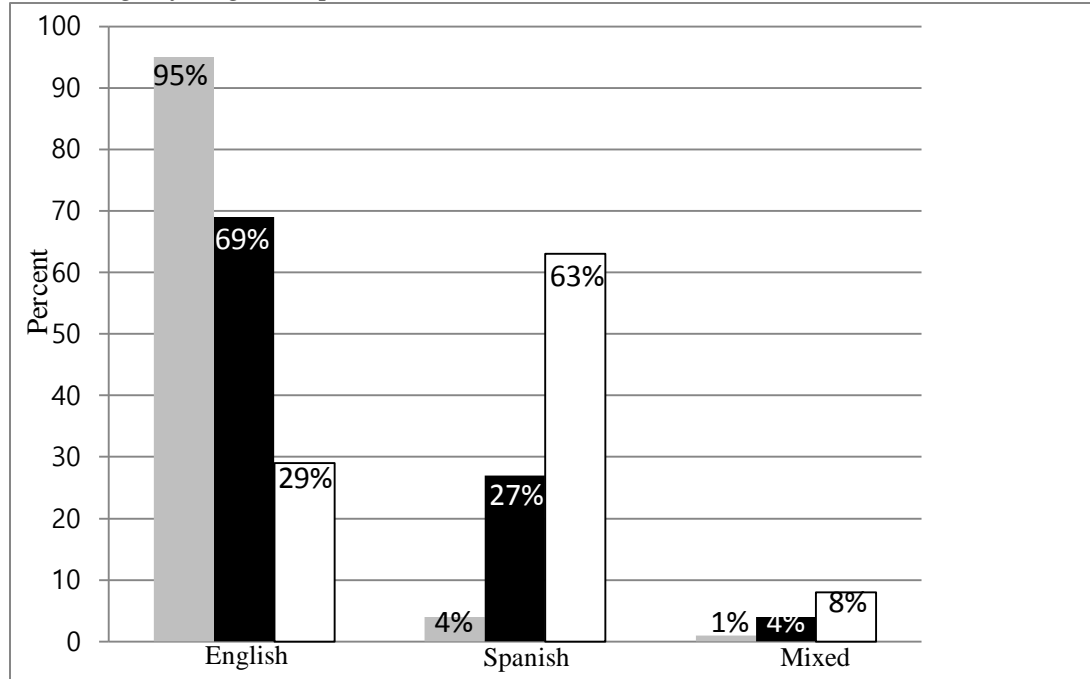
Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the social and cultural factors that are necessary for bilingual children with ASC. Observing one family with a child with ASC in various settings revealed several important key contextual factors.

The foremost essential factor was the language consistency in the household. Adam has been exposed to Spanish even before birth. He interacts in Spanish with all his family members. Lisette and Pedro strive to create and maintain a Spanish-rich environment where Adam is expected to follow certain routines, such as reciting numbers up to 100 and prayers in Spanish every night with his parents. Adam recites everything wholeheartedly, although he may have been bored with daily routines. Perhaps it was the environment that Adam's parents created for Adam, where Adam felt loved and cherished, as his parents used this opportunity to connect with Adam.

Adam's parents' untiring efforts to raise their children bilingually were evident in every part of their life. Observing Adam in naturalistic family interactions provided a much richer picture as to how conversations were constructed in his family. It also provided opportunities for the family members to "secure the child's attention, clarify possible misunderstandings, fill in missing information, and otherwise promote the child's social involvement" (Ochs & Solomon, 2005, p. 152).

Adam's ASC did not change or affect his parents with their language preference and cultural practices at home, as ASC was only a fraction of who Adam was. Lisette and Pedro saw Adam, their child, not the label imposed by the society and the dominant culture, which often impose beliefs that comes with the label. In addition, Lisette and Pedro chose to preserve their own cultural identity in every way they possibly could, which was also shown in the names of their children, easily pronounced interchangeably in English and Spanish. Although Lisette was, at times, very

apprehensive about exposing her children only to Spanish during summer months, as doing so might result her children to be identified as English Language Learners, Lisette nonetheless continued exposing her children the way she has been taught and raised.

Another factor was Lisettes's involvement in Adam's education. Lisette and Pedro were more aware of Adam's strengths and weaknesses than anyone else at his school. For instance, it was Lisette, at the IEP meeting, who suggested rephrasing open-ended questions to the professionals so that they could work on his strengths, rather than on his weaknesses. Although Adam's teachers repeatedly mentioned that Adam "is on when he is on," or "he was not with me," during tests and therapy sessions, attributing the lack of attention or cooperation to his ASC, Adam was alluding to his teachers by his behaviors that he was either bored or disinterested in the sessions that he was in. Often disability labels are more prominent than the child himself; however, when one sees the child before the label and tries utmost efforts to presume competence in him or her (Biklen & Burke, 2006), the child will be "on," and the child will "be with you" under any circumstances. As Lisette alluded, it is imperative that educators work on the child's strengths rather than weaknesses, and this begins when educators presume competence rather than incompetence.

Nevertheless, Adam was in an environment where people truly cared about him, which was evidenced by the principal's comment, "What would he benefit from?" at the IEP meeting. The principal was genuinely interested in hearing Lisette's opinions and thoughts as to how to maximize educational benefits for Adam. The principal considered Lisette as as an equally contributing partner in the IEP process as she understood "the limits of her own knowledge and learns to weave mothers' knowledge into that understanding,"

(Harry, 2011, p. 191).

All these external factors have contributed Adam to maintain his culture and language. Adam has benefited tremendously by having parents who are committed to raising him bilingually and culturally competently. Despite being in a macro-culture where assimilation into the dominant culture is a norm, Adam's parents chose to preserve their roots and identities as well as their children's identities through preserving their native language regardless of their child's label: ASC. Perhaps to Adam's parents, preserving their culture and language preceded their son's diagnosis of ASC by professionals, or the label of ASC did not matter raising Adam bilingually according to their cultural beliefs. In Adam's house, language was used not only to communicate, but also to preserve their heritage and identity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Wink, 2010).

As this case study examined only one bilingual family, more research studies must be conducted to examine how other non-English speaking families and their cultures perceive and practice bilingualism and whether there are any other unforeseen factors in other cultures and peoples. Nonetheless, it has important implications for general and special educators as well as other school-based professionals to learn about different perspectives on disability, such as the social model of disability and school practices and beliefs of family members with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. More importantly, it is imperative that practitioners and educators consult and collaborate with family members (Harry, 2011) so that they enrich students' learning and implement better teaching and intervention strategies (Zhang & Bennett, 2003; Welterlin & LaRue, 2007), rather than blindly imposing professionals' beliefs or judgement according to the dominant societal views on disability.

Lastly, this case study sheds light on how a paradigm shift in ASC can induce

different research methodologies and findings. Research should not always focus on how deviant children with ASC are from those without ASC, based on the deficit-based perspective, attributing the disability entirely within the individual; rather, it should be about *how* we can cultivate environments, where all are appreciated, welcomed, and empowered, regardless of what they are, how they look like, and what they speak at home. This begins only when we challenge and demystify our perspectives on disability and start focusing on abilities rather than on disabilities in all at home, at school, and in our society. After all, "it is not a matter of how smart students are, but rather how they are smart" (Rapp & Arndt, 2012, p. 57).

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Footnotes

[1]Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) are used over Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). We

explain our reasoning in the text.

[2]All the names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

[3]The following transcription conventions (MacWhinney, 2000) are used to describe

conversational phenomena:

Unintelligible speech... xxx
Pauses... (.)
Actions .... %act
Comments... %com
Mixed utterances... [+ language]