



Research Article

The Determinants of the Mother Tongue of Bilingual People

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Abstract:

In our world, there are still bilingual or multilingual people who find it difficult to identify their mother tongue or the mother tongue of a person in their society due to their mastery of two or more languages at the same level of proficiency to a great extent and due to their effective use of two or more languages in their daily lives. This study aimed to establish determinants that would assist us in identifying the language that is arguably a person's mother tongue or first language. The members of the study population were described in a manner that includes their personal and linguistic characteristics, using the descriptive method. This research included a proposal for a set of determinants in the form of a refereed and tested questionnaire distributed to the research sample, which is composed of bilingual people. In addition, the success rate of each of these determinants was measured in determining the mother tongue of the respondents to the questionnaire by calculating the frequency of the determinants that determined the mother tongue of respondents using the statistical analytical method. The study was able to determine the final determinants that help identify the mother tongue of bilingual people.

Keywords: Bilinguals, Mother Tongue, Multilingualism

1. Introduction.

At the outset, it is important to note that this research was originally published in Arabic in *Judhoor Journal*, issued by the Literary and Cultural Club Jeddah, Issue 63, December 2021. In view of the significance of the research topic, the author has decided to republish the study in English to broaden access to its scientific content.

In many countries and societies, it is common to observe individuals using more than one language in their daily lives. This phenomenon can be attributed to various factors, one of which is the imposition of more than one official language by the state. Indeed, several countries adopt multiple languages for both formal and informal communication, resulting in bilingual or multilingual communities. Additionally, some individuals are born to parents who speak different native languages, which leads them to acquire both languages from early childhood and achieve balanced proficiency in each. Consequently, such individuals may find it difficult to determine which

language qualifies as their mother tongue. It is a common misconception that bilingual individuals are rare or constitute a minority within the global population. However, as Grosjean (2010) notes in the introduction to his book *Bilingual*, approximately half of the world's population-or even more-are bilingual.

Due to the limited number of studies - to the best of the researcher's knowledge - that have addressed this topic with the aim of developing tools to help identify the mother tongue of bilingual individuals, and in response to requests from families and acquaintances of bilinguals seeking a method to determine the mother tongue of their relatives or colleagues, whether in social or professional contexts, this study was undertaken. The purpose of the research is to propose a set of criteria for identifying the mother tongue of bilinguals, to subject these criteria to expert review by specialists in language education, learning, and acquisition, and subsequently to test the proposed framework on a sample drawn from the study population. This population consists specifically of bilingual individuals and, more broadly, multilingual speakers.

Bilingual or multilingual individuals are those who use two or more languages in their daily lives and possess the ability to employ these languages with comparable proficiency and balanced functionality across communicative situations. As noted by Desmet and Duyck (2007, p. 108), bilingualism does not merely refer to a high level of proficiency in two languages; rather, it encompasses the regular use of two or more languages. Bilingual individuals are thus defined as those who need to use more than one language as part of their everyday interactions and activities.

2. Research Problem and Questions

As the world has become a global village, with increased ease of mobility and residence across different regions, and as global openness has expanded, a growing number of individuals have come to acquire two or more languages throughout their lives due to various circumstances and needs. In many countries and communities, people require more than one language to communicate effectively. Within the Arab world as well, certain societies use two languages concurrently. For instance, in the Maghreb countries, both Arabic and French are commonly used. Similarly, linguistic diversity in the United Arab Emirates has reached a level where a significant portion of the population is bilingual or multilingual.

The same phenomenon can be observed in many Arab communities, albeit less visibly or widely. For example, the children of Arab expatriates who were born and received their primary or intermediate education in non-Arab countries often become bilingual. In such cases, their families may feel the need to identify the child's mother tongue in order to intervene and support the development of Arabic as their primary language, aligning it with their parental heritage. The situation can become more problematic when the individual has not formally learned Arabic but has acquired it solely through exposure at home. In such cases, Arabic may not serve as the language of daily communication or social interaction, particularly during their time abroad. These individuals are referred to as *heritage language speakers*, and their mother tongue is often the language of the country in which they were born, raised, and received early education.

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. Who are bilingual individuals?
2. Is it possible to determine the mother tongue of bilingual or multilingual speakers?
3. How can we identify the mother tongue of bilingual or multilingual individuals?

4. To what extent are the proposed criteria effective in determining the mother tongue of bilingual individuals?

3. Research Objectives

This study aims to propose a set of criteria that can assist in identifying the mother tongue of bilingual individuals. The research objectives can be outlined as follows:

- To provide an accurate and contextually relevant description of bilingual and multilingual individuals, aligned with the focus of the study.
- To highlight the importance of identifying the mother tongue in an individual's life, particularly for bilingual or multilingual speakers.
- To develop a set of criteria that can aid bilingual individuals in determining their mother tongue.
- To validate these proposed criteria through expert review and apply them to a selected sample from the study population representing bilingual individuals.

4. Research Population and Scope

The research population consists of individuals who are bilingual or multilingual. The proposed study sample includes a selected group of individuals who demonstrate a high and relatively balanced level of proficiency in two or more languages and actively use these languages in their daily lives. While some studies suggest that bilingualism can begin in early childhood, this study focuses specifically on adult bilinguals, as the research instrument developed is designed to be applicable only to adult participants.

5. Research Methodology

This study adopts two main methodologies: the descriptive method and the statistical analytical method, as outlined below:

Descriptive Method:

The descriptive approach, as noted by 'Alyan and Ghuneim (2000, p. 42), is used to examine current scientific phenomena or problems through systematic description, which in turn leads to logical interpretations supported by evidence and reasoning. In this study, the researcher will employ the descriptive method to characterize bilingual individuals according to the operational definition adopted in the research, to describe the problem of identifying their mother tongue, and to analyze and interpret this issue by uncovering its underlying causes, ultimately aiming to propose a solution.

Statistical Analytical Method:

Using the statistical analytical method, the researcher will test the proposed criteria by transforming them into a research questionnaire administered to members of the study sample. The effectiveness of the criteria in identifying participants' mother tongues will be measured by analyzing their responses to the questionnaire items. The questionnaire contains the proposed set of criteria intended to assist in identifying the mother tongue of bilingual individuals. The goal is to arrive at

results that demonstrate the extent to which these criteria are effective in achieving the intended purpose.

6. Theoretical Framework and Review of Previous Studies

6.1. Terminological Background

In this study, we focus on clarifying the concepts of *bilingualism* and *mother tongue*, as doing so is essential for proceeding with the research based on the operational definitions adopted herein. Although linguistic studies have offered extensive definitions of these terms, it is necessary to revisit and contextualize them in a manner consistent with the objectives of this study and its central research problem.

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>), *bilingual* is defined as the ability to use two languages equally well. A bilingual person is described as “a person who speaks two languages equally well”. Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2010, p. 54), in their *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, define bilingualism as “a person who uses at least two languages with some degree of proficiency. In everyday use bilingual usually means a person who speaks, reads or understands two languages equally well (a balanced bilingual), but a bilingual person usually has a better knowledge of one language than another”.

Researchers have presented divergent perspectives on the definition of bilingualism, generally falling into two main camps. The first emphasizes full proficiency in two languages as a prerequisite for being considered bilingual, while the second argues that equal mastery of both languages is not necessary. Some scholars from the latter view also assert that bilingualism can arise when an individual is exposed to two languages simultaneously from early childhood.

Among the first group, *Huston* (2002, p. 40) defines true bilinguals as individuals who have mastered two languages from childhood and can switch between them effortlessly and fluently. *Thiery* (1978, p. 146) shifts the focus to societal perception, proposing that a bilingual person is one who is accepted as a member of two linguistically and socio-culturally similar communities.

Bloomfield (1933, p. 132) offers a more stringent definition, describing bilingualism as native-like control of two languages. Similarly, *Albert and Obler* (1978, p. 73) define bilingualism as the ideal use of two or more languages. *Mackey and Siguan* (1987), in their book *Education and Bilingualism* (Arabic translation: Miguel Siguan & William F. Mackey, 1995, p. 1), describe a bilingual person as someone “who masters a second language to a level comparable to their native language and can use both with the same effect and proficiency in all situations.”

Meanwhile, *Desmet and Duyck* (2007, p. 168), citing *Grosjean* (1992), argue that the term *bilingual* does not exclusively apply to individuals with equal command of two languages. Rather, it encompasses those who use two or more languages regularly in daily life -individuals who need and employ multiple languages in their everyday interactions.

From the second perspective, *Macnamara* (1967) defines bilingualism as possessing a minimal level of proficiency in at least one skill of a second language. *Al-Sawy and Taha* (2014), citing *Maxwell* (1991), note that bilingualism refers to “the ability to use two different languages successfully. Some individuals may be stronger in one language, others in the second, while some may blend both languages in a simplified form.”

François Grosjean (2010, p. 19) proposes a more inclusive definition, viewing bilinguals as individuals who use two (or more) languages or dialects in their daily lives. His definition

emphasizes the regular use of languages rather than fluency, and notably includes dialects alongside standard languages.

Muhammad Al-Khouli (2002, p. 17) summarizes various definitions of bilingualism presented by scholars as follows: that individuals in a society speak two languages, or that a person knows two languages, or is proficient in two languages, or uses two languages. He points out that these definitions tend to be incomplete or ambiguous. Al-Khouli (2002, p. 18) offers a more comprehensive definition, describing bilingualism as the use of two languages—by an individual or a group—to any degree of proficiency, in any language skill, and for any communicative purpose.

Roshdi Ta'ima (p. 73) notes that the only condition under which an individual may be considered bilingual is when “a child is given the opportunity to interact with speakers of both languages—either being born to parents who speak different languages and acquiring each from them, or growing up during the early years of life in a bilingual community.” However, others argue that an individual can become bilingual after puberty. François Grosjean (2010, p. 95) attributes such cases to factors including immigration, marrying a speaker of another language (which then becomes the language of the home and daily life), among other circumstances. He further observes that an individual may even forget their childhood language if it is abandoned for a prolonged period.

Some confusion also exists between the concepts of *bilingualism* and *diglossia*. Ibrahim Mahmoud (2002, p. 60) distinguishes between these two terms: *diglossia* refers to a sociolinguistic phenomenon that characterizes an entire society, whereas *bilingualism* pertains to the individual and describes their ability to use more than one language -a concept more closely related to psycholinguistics. Diglossia involves variations within a single language, while bilingualism involves the use of two distinct languages.

This study adopts the definition proposed by the first group of scholars. Accordingly, a bilingual individual is defined as someone who has fully mastered two languages and alternates between them in daily life according to communicative needs - someone who uses both languages with such balance that determining their mother tongue becomes difficult.

Al-Khouli (2002, pp. 22–23) refers to this level of bilingualism as *ideal bilingualism*, characterized by complete mastery of both languages, such that no observable difference exists in the individual's linguistic performance across the two languages. In this case, the individual uses both languages like native speakers of each, across all situations and for all purposes.

In contrast, the term *mother tongue* is relatively less complex and more clearly defined than *bilingualism*. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>), it is “the first language you learn as a child.”

Likewise, in English linguistic dictionaries such as the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*. Richards and Schmidt (2010, p. 377) define the *mother tongue* as the language typically acquired at home during early childhood.

Al-Khouli (2002, p. 128) identifies three related terms that may be relevant to this study's objective of identifying a person's primary language: *first language*, *dominant language*, and *preferred language*. The *first language* is the one acquired first, but it may not remain dominant; a second language might surpass it in terms of proficiency or frequency of use. The *preferred language*, meanwhile, may differ from both the first and the dominant language and is the one the individual prefers to use in specific contexts or environments.

6.2. Previous Studies

Numerous studies have explored bilingualism from various perspectives, and many of these were consulted during the preparation of this research. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study to date has focused on developing a set of criteria or determinants to help identify the mother tongue of bilingual individuals. This gap in the literature served as the primary motivation for conducting this study and proposing such criteria. The review of previous studies will focus on two key books which, from the researcher's point of view, are among the most significant contributions to this field:

- *Bilingual Book* by François Grosjean, translated into Arabic by Zeinab Atef.
- *Living with Two Languages Book* by Dr. Muhammad Ali Al-Khouli.

The book *Bilingual*: addresses a wide range of critical topics related to bilingualism and raises profound questions, such as: Why do people become bilingual? How can bilingual individuals be described? How do their languages evolve throughout their lives? The book also delves into psychological and sociocultural dimensions such as attitudes toward bilingualism, bicultural identity, the personalities, thoughts, dreams, and emotions of bilingual individuals, and even discusses "exceptional bilinguals." Furthermore, an entire chapter is devoted to bilingual children, exploring issues such as dual language acquisition, the role of the family in fostering bilingualism, and the educational implications of bilingualism. As such, this book encompasses many topics that have been addressed individually in various specialized studies, offering the researcher a comprehensive resource.

The book *Living with Two Languages* is another valuable contribution in this domain. It discusses a variety of important and diverse topics related to bilingualism, including types and definitions of bilingualism, its relation to the individual, society, and culture, methods of learning, linguistic skills, degrees of proficiency, the role of time and place, language choice, and linguistic performance. It also examines bilingualism in a global context by referencing monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual countries, linguistic minorities, linguistic tolerance, and language suppression. Moreover, it distinguishes between natural and artificial language environments and addresses topics in linguistics such as language interference, borrowing, error analysis, and types of interference—phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and cultural. A dedicated chapter explores the measurement of bilingualism at both the societal and individual levels. The book also covers issues in bilingual education, including its advocates and opponents, program types, and assessment approaches, and it discusses the bilingual brain, challenges faced by bilingual individuals, and the cognitive and social effects of bilingualism.

What this study seeks to add to the existing body of work on bilingualism is a novel approach to identifying the language most likely to be considered the mother tongue in bilingual individuals. This approach involves developing a set of situational prompts and stimuli designed to lead individuals to select one language over the other in specific communicative contexts or in response to certain cues. These scenarios and stimuli will then be tested on a sample of bilingual participants to assess their effectiveness in determining the individual's primary language.

7. Study Procedures and Instruments

The researcher undertook several steps to arrive at the study's findings. These procedures included the following:

- Developing a list of determinants, which consisted of a set of actions and behaviors commonly performed by bilingual individuals, as well as stimuli they encounter in their daily lives. These determinants were designed to help identify the language bilingual individuals use while performing such actions or responding to those stimuli.
- Transforming the list of determinants into a questionnaire, comprising measurable items aimed at identifying the mother tongue of bilingual participants.
- Validating and piloting the questionnaire by submitting it to expert reviewers for content validation and administering it to a pilot sample prior to its use as the primary data collection instrument.
- Distributing the questionnaire to the study sample, collecting the responses, and analyzing the data in order to reach the study's final results.

7.1 The List of Determinants for Identifying the Mother Tongue of Bilingual Individuals

The researcher developed this list based on his accumulated experience in teaching Arabic as a second language, where it is common to encounter students who are proficient in more than one language. Many foreign language instructors are particularly interested in knowing their learners' language backgrounds to better support them in understanding the structure of the target language. In addition to practical experience, the list was also informed by previous studies and research that examined the lives of bilingual individuals from various perspectives.

In this context, the term *determinants* refers to a set of situations or stimuli that can assist in identifying the most likely language choice a bilingual individual would use when responding to those situations or stimuli. These determinants were diverse and encompassed several categories, including:

- **Daily life situations**, such as counting money or speaking with a doctor.
- **Linguistic interference**, such as lexical borrowing and preferred direction of translation.
- **Direct use of language skills**, such as writing academic papers or reading newspapers.
- **Personality traits and individual preferences**, including the influence of the language spoken by parents.
- **Intangible sensory factors**, such as emotions, inner thoughts, and dreams.

The following table summarizes the key determinants proposed by the researcher, upon which the study instrument was developed.

Table: Situations and Stimuli Proposed as Determinants for Identifying the Mother Tongue of Bilingual Individuals

Situation or Stimulus		Situation or Stimulus		Situation or Stimulus	
1	Using an ATM machine	2	Counting money	3	Speaking with a doctor
4	Being involved in an accident	5	Opening a bank account	6	Listening to music
7	Reading literary books	8	Reading the newspaper	9	Typing speed
10	Language of the internet browser	11	Watching movies	12	Signature
13	Writing academic research	14	Writing personal diaries	15	Language used in the mobile phone system
16	Contact names stored in the mobile phone	17	Commenting on football matches	18	Display language of the computer operating system
19	Interface language of social media platforms	20	Reading instruction manuals for electronic devices	21	Email signature language
22	Mother's language	23	Spouse's language	24	Children's language
25	Father's language	26	Preferred names for sons or daughters	27	The more formal version of the respondent's personality
28	Expressing pain or distress, or the language used during illness	29	Language used with the police or in criminal investigations	30	Language closest to the respondent's culture
31	Language of dreams	32	Expressing feelings and emotions	33	Language used when angry or emotionally aroused
34	The more humorous and playful side of the respondent's personality	35	Ability to teach the language to others	36	Language used in job or travel interviews
37	Frequency of pauses during speech	38	Easiest direction for oral translation	39	Need to think more while speaking
40	Inner/mental language (silent thinking or mental processing)	41	Taking tests (e.g., academic, IQ, or theoretical driving exams)	42	Language borrowing or code-switching while speaking (linguistic interference)

7.2 Study Questionnaire and Its Contents

Among the research tools recommended by Al-Khouli (2002, p. 130) for measuring individual bilingualism are: questionnaires, tests, interviews, self-assessments, and evaluations by close associates. In this study, the researcher selected the questionnaire as the primary research

instrument due to its suitability for the research topic. The questionnaire was constructed based on the previously identified determinants, and was designed as follows:

The table for Questionnaire Items (Determinants)

Questionnaire Items (Determinants)		Languages Proficiently Used		Ineffective Determinant	Irrelevant Determinant
Question / Responses		A	B	C	D
No.	Situation or Stimulus	Language (A)	Language (B)	I do not feel any difference between the two languages	I have never encountered this situation before

It is important to clarify that Language (A) and Language (B), as referred to in the questionnaire, do not correspond to the "first language" and "second language," respectively. Nor do they indicate which language was acquired first. It is widely recognized that individuals may acquire two languages either simultaneously or sequentially. According to François Grosjean (2010, p. 173), most linguists agree that children up to the age of four typically acquire languages in a simultaneous bilingualism pattern, while sequential bilingualism usually begins around the age of five. Grosjean also notes that simultaneous bilingualism- where children acquire two languages from the very beginning of their language development- is relatively less common compared to sequential bilingualism, in which children acquire two languages one after the other.

To gather additional insights that may benefit this study or future research, the researcher included a number of demographic and background questions in the questionnaire, such as:

- Name, age, gender, and nationality.
- Other languages spoken or partially mastered in addition to the two primary languages.
- Duration and manner of use for each of the two primary languages.
- Participants' own perceptions of the factors that led them to become bilingual.

7.3. Study Implementation and Data Analysis

The researcher was able to obtain 19 fully completed responses from participants. Below is a presentation of the full questionnaire along with the participants' responses. The responses were distributed as follows:

Part 1 of the questionnaire, table of Preliminary Participant Information

Before responding to the questionnaire items, participants were asked to provide the following background information:	
Name:	
Age:	Participant ages ranged from 16 to 37
Gender:	8 female, 11 male.
Nationality:	9 from Russia, 1 from Saudi Arabia, 2 from the United Kingdom,

	3 from the United States, 1 from Switzerland, 2 from Jordan, 1 from Canada.
Number of languages spoken	1 participant speaks four languages, 3 speak three languages, and 15 speak two languages.
Number of languages fully mastered	All participants are bilingual.
Languages mastered:	A diverse range of languages, including Russian, Tajik, Chechen, Uzbek, English, Urdu, Arabic, French, and German.
Mode of language use:	58% use both languages alternately on a daily or near-daily basis. 42% use languages depending on the surrounding language community.
Duration of language use:	21% use Language (A) more frequently. 11% use Language (B) more frequently. 68% use both languages equally.
Factors contributing to bilingualism:	Education, particularly bilingual education, parental influence, surrounding environment, migration, employment, diplomatic professions, translation, and foreign language teaching.

Table of Questionnaire Items (Determinants): Participant Response Distribution

Questionnaire Items (Determinants)					
Question/Answers		A	B	C	D
No	Situation or Stimulus	Language (A)	Language (B)	No noticeable difference between the two languages	Have not encountered this situation before
1	Which language do you use at an ATM?	8	7	4	
2	Which language do you use when counting money?	7	7	5	
3	Which language do you use when speaking with a doctor?	6	8	5	
4	Which language do you use when involved in an accident?	7	7	2	3
5	Which language do you prefer when interacting with police or during investigations?	5	6	2	6
6	Which language do you use when opening a bank account?	6	6	5	2
7	In which language do you prefer to express severe pain or distress?	9	7	2	1

8	Which language do you prefer to use when sick or tired?	8	8	3	
9	In which language do you prefer listening to music?	9	8	2	
10	In which language do you prefer reading literary books?	10	8	1	
11	In which language do you prefer to read newspapers?	7	8	3	1
12	In which language do you prefer to read the instruction manuals that come with electronic devices?	7	6	5	1
13	In which language is your typing speed (on a keyboard) higher?	7	9	3	
14	In which language do you prefer your internet browser interface to be?	8	6	5	
15	In which language do you prefer your computer's display language to be?	8	6	5	
16	In which language do you prefer your mobile phone's operating system to be?	7	6	6	
17	In which language do you enter contact names in your mobile phone?	6	6	7	
18	In which language do you prefer the interface of your personal profile on social media platforms?	7	6	5	1
19	In which language do you prefer your email signature to be written?	8	5	3	3
20	In which language do you prefer to watch movies?	5	6	6	2
21	In which language do you prefer listening to commentary while watching football matches?	8	6	3	2
22	Which language do you use when signing your name? (manual/personal signature)	9	8	1	1
23	In which language do you prefer writing academic research?	2	3	3	11
24	In which language do you prefer writing personal diaries?	4	3	4	8
25	What is your mother's language?	9	10		
26	What is your father's language?	9	10		
27	What is your spouse's language? (If the answer is neither Language A nor Language B, choose "Have not encountered this situation")	5	7		7

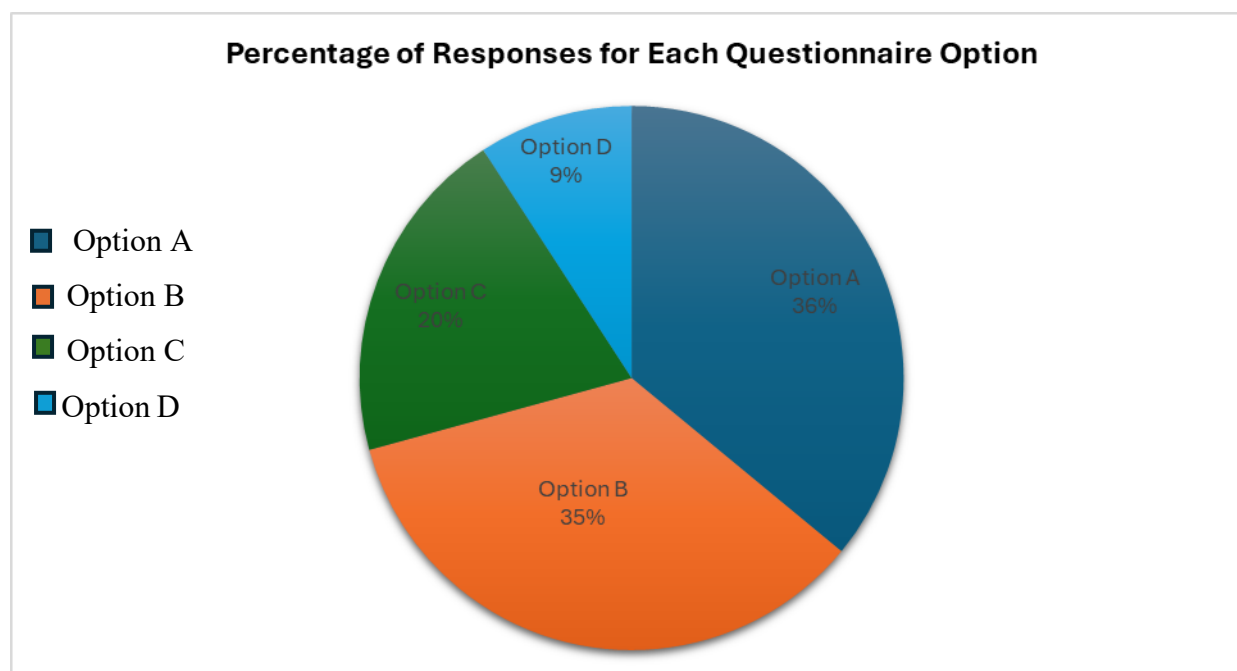
28	What is your children's language?	5	4		10
29	In which language are your preferred names for sons or daughters?	7	7	4	1
30	Which language makes you feel more formal when using it?	8	8	3	
31	Which language makes you feel more humorous and playful when using it?	9	8	2	
32	Which language do you feel is closer to your cultural identity?	7	8	4	
33	In which language do you most frequently dream?	9	9	1	
34	In which language do you prefer to express emotions and feelings?	7	6	5	1
35	In which language do you prefer to express yourself when angry or emotionally agitated?	7	7	5	
36	Which of the two languages do you feel more capable of teaching to others?	4	4	5	6
37	In which language do you prefer to conduct personal or formal interviews for work or travel?	5	3	8	3
38	In which language do you tend to have longer or more frequent pauses during speech?	4	5	5	5
39	Into which language is oral translation easier for you?	6	5	8	
40	In which language do you feel a greater need to think before speaking?	5	5	9	
	Which language do you use for inner speech or silent thinking—commonly referred to as the language of thought or mental language?	8	7	4	
	In which language do you prefer to take general and specific tests, such as academic exams, IQ tests, or theoretical driving tests?	6	7	6	
	From which language do you borrow more often when speaking? (i.e., linguistic borrowing or code-switching between the two languages)	5	9	5	

After reviewing the responses of the 19 bilingual participants, the following key findings emerged:

- **Ideal bilingualism** can persist into advanced stages of life and may continue to develop in a manner similar to how a single language evolves among monolingual individuals.

- Certain national systems have contributed to the prevalence of bilingualism. This is particularly evident in countries of the former Soviet Union, where individuals often speak two languages: their native/local language and Russian, which they acquire through education, professional life, and social interaction.
- **58%** of participants reported using both languages alternately in their daily lives, while **42%** indicated that they use each language separately depending on the linguistic environment they are in. For instance, some respondents reported using *Language A* for approximately four months each year during visits to its native community, while the rest of the year they use *Language B*.
- The reasons cited for becoming bilingual varied. Some participants reported receiving education in two languages, one used at home and the other at school—from early childhood through university. Others attributed their bilingualism to living in a linguistically diverse environment, to migration or employment, or to working in fields such as translation or language instruction, which required constant engagement with two languages and led to full proficiency in both.
- **71%** of the responses indicated a clear preference for one of the two languages in specific situations, compared to **29%** of responses indicating either no perceived difference between the languages or a lack of exposure to the situation. This suggests that a significant proportion of the proposed determinants were effective in identifying the language, most likely to be considered the respondent's mother tongue.
- The **71%** preference rate for one language over the other also reflects the overall success of many of the determinants in differentiating between the two languages, whereas the remaining **29%** included responses where the determinant was ineffective—either due to no perceived linguistic difference or lack of contextual exposure.
- **9%** of the responses indicated a lack of exposure to certain situations—understandably so, given that not all participants encounter all listed scenarios. Examples include being involved in an accident, dealing with law enforcement or criminal investigations, signing an email electronically, writing academic research, or keeping personal diaries. Some participants were not married or had no children, while others had never taught a language to others.
- The preferences for *Language A* and *Language B* were **almost equally distributed**, with *Language A* being selected in **36%** of cases and *Language B* in **35%**, indicating a strong balance in language use among participants.

The following figure summarizes the percentage of responses for each of the four answer choices:



8. Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

At the conclusion of this study, I would like to express my gratitude to the bilingual individuals I had the opportunity to meet. Through them, I discovered how fascinating and complex the world of bilingualism and multilingualism truly is—rich with diverse life experiences. Some of them have reached a stage where they use both languages in their daily lives subconsciously and in a structured manner. They may speak to their neighbor, grocer, restaurant server, and doctor in one language, and to a different neighbor, a colleague at work, or a traffic officer in another. Over time, the language used becomes associated with the identity of each person they interact with.

Based on the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Bilingualism has been defined in various ways by scholars, differing in terms of language proficiency, linguistic skills, and frequency or duration of language use.
- A bilingual individual may achieve full proficiency in both languages to the extent that it becomes difficult to determine which language qualifies as the mother tongue.
- A set of situational determinants can be used as a tool to help identify the mother tongue of bilingual individuals.
- The dominance of one language over another can evolve over time depending on patterns of use.
- Bilinguals represent a distinct segment of society that warrants further linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural research, as their experiences differ significantly from those of monolingual individuals.

9. Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following:

- Conducting a similar study focused on children, as natural bilingualism occurs when a child is exposed to two languages simultaneously from early childhood. Al-Khouli (2002, p. 39) notes that this occurs when both parents are bilingual, allowing the child to acquire two languages concurrently, with no clear order of acquisition. In such cases, both languages become primary languages.
- Carrying out additional studies that replicate and expand on this research, testing the proposed determinants while adding to them in order to create a more comprehensive tool.
- Encouraging researchers and practitioners in the fields of language acquisition and bilingualism to develop a standardized list of determinants that can be adopted by institutions concerned with bilingual studies in the future.

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