Research Summary: Crago et al 1998

Title: **Power and Deference**
Bilingual Decision Making in Inuit Homes

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Main questions:

- What decisions do Inuit parents make about their children's indigenous language socialization, in the context of rapid language and cultural change? What conscious versus subconscious decisions do parents make?
- To what extent and how are bilingual parents different from monolingual parents?
- What conditions and attitudes affect how bilingual families' use language with their children? How do factors such as gender, status, respect, and racism affect their decisions? How do factors such as language of education and historical, political, and economic realities contribute?
- How do parent's decisions affect overall indigenous language growth, maintenance, and loss?

Some background ideas:

- The study looked at bilingual families from two Inuit communities in northern Quebec. One community represents a larger community with a multicultural population. The second community is very remote, small, and mostly one culture - Inuit.
- The table below outlines language use and ethnicity for the four families from the study.

	Mother's ethnicity / language	Father's ethnicity / language
Family 1	Mixed ethnicity. Home: Inuktitut, English School: French Fluent. Inuk, Eng, Fr	Inuk. Home: Inuktitut School: English Fluent: Inuk, Eng
Family 2	Inuk Home: Inuktitut School: English Fluent: Inuk, Eng	English Home / school: English Fluent: Eng, Fr
Family 3	Inuk Home: Inuktitut School: English Fluent: Inuk, Eng	French Home / school: French Fluent: Fr, Eng
Family 4	Mixed ethnicity Home: Inuktitut, English School: English Fluent: Inuk, Eng	English Home / school / fluent: English

- All Inuit in both communities speak Inuktitut. The communities presently experience rapid social and linguistic changes and face great potential to lose the Inuktitut language.
- Many children around the world are raised bilingually.
- Bilingual families can include parents from very different cultures. They speak languages with very distinct structural characteristics and properties.
- Bilingual families may include one parent from an indigenous group at risk of losing their language.

- Language use in homes does not correspond to ethnicity. Inuk – Inuk couples may either speak Inuktitut only or a combination of Inuktitut and English. Couples with both parents from mixed language homes often speak both Inuktitut and English. Inuk – non-Inuk couples speak mostly English.

Main comments and conclusions:

- In three of the study homes parents made no conscious decisions about how to use language or what language(s) to use.
- All parents believe their children will learn at least two languages. Parents believe this even though most of them make no conscious decision to regularly expose their children to the different languages at home.
- All families think children learn language according to what language they hear around them. But parents don't use this knowledge to make decisions about how to use language at home.
- Most families did not define or recognize a direct relationship between Inuktitut language and Inuit identity.
- The families demonstrated examples of several rigid boundaries that demonstrate a power and gender difference.
    - ✓ English-speaking fathers spoke only their first language. They did not like others to speak Inuktitut in their presence; it made them uncomfortable.
    - ✓ Fathers made decisions about language use but did not communicate these decisions to their wives. Some non-Inuit fathers felt they had more knowledge than their wives on issues of language use in the world.
- Some couples compromised. French-speaking fathers and Inuit mothers speak English. They may lack good skills in their second language. Children overhear English and it may become a desirable and high-status language in the home.

- All parents look to the school to strengthen their children's Inuktitut. Non-Inuit fathers in particular felt they have no role to help their children learn Inuktitut. They see that anyone but themselves has responsibility to maintain the language: their Inuit wives, books, school, and scholars.
- All the children in the study had good Inuktitut skills, except those from family 4. This reflects the strength of the mother's input to their children, language use in the community, or a strong decision to use Inuktitut with their children.
- Once children go to school and have more contact with the wider community, English becomes more and more dominant in their lives. Especially if they do not have available or do not study in the Inuktitut language stream at school.
- Parents do not fully understand how their children learn language or what conditions help them learn two languages at the same time.
- Parents experience various conditions and attitudes that affect language learning and use. They have economic pulls, concerns about school, TV and other media, cultural patterns, and gender and power differences.
- Language loss comes from how parents use language and communicate with their small children and with each other, not just from school and government policies.
- Long-term survival of Inuktitut depends on the home and on both parents, not just on Inuit mothers and the community's schools.