

# Heritage and Global Language Use among Lithuanian-English Bilinguals: Language Maintenance and Identity Preservation in Kaunas



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## ABSTRACT

The growing use of English in non-English-speaking contexts has raised concerns about heritage language maintenance and identity preservation. In Lithuania, English increasingly functions as a language of education, work, and international communication, while Lithuanian remains central to national and cultural identity. This qualitative case study investigated language-use patterns, heritage language maintenance, and identity preservation among three Lithuanian–English bilinguals in Kaunas. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and limited observations across family, education, and community domains. The analysis was guided by Setiawan’s (2013) domain-based language-use framework and Fishman’s theory of language maintenance. The findings show that participants used Lithuanian and English differently across domains. English was dominant in educational, professional, and international interactions, while Lithuanian remained important in family communication, local interactions, cultural practices, and media engagement. Participants maintained Lithuanian through intergenerational communication, positive language attitudes, cultural participation, and exposure to Lithuanian songs, books, and community practices. Although English served important practical and global functions, participants continued to associate Lithuanian with belonging, heritage, and cultural continuity. The study suggests that heritage language maintenance depends not only on frequency of use but also on emotional attachment, family transmission, and cultural identification.

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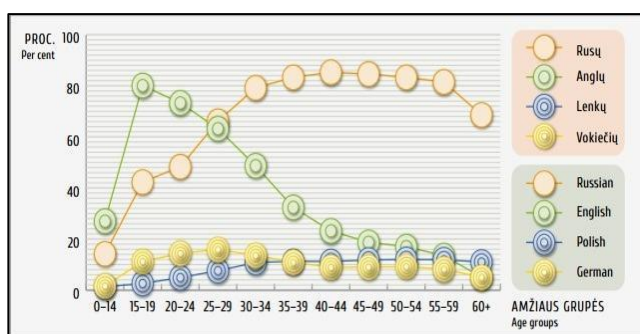
## INTRODUCTION

Lithuania, as a non-English-speaking nation, emphasizes the use of its heritage language, Lithuanian, in all societal domains. The official translation of the Law on the State Language of Lithuania (1995), Chapter IV, Article 11 on Education and Culture, states that the government guarantees all citizens access to Lithuanian for use in institutions such as general schools, vocational schools, higher education, and universities. The use of the state language is intended to ensure citizens' right to become proficient in Lithuanian. As a result, citizens are expected to use standard Lithuanian and integrate it into educational activities. Additionally, Chapter IX, Article 22 on the Correctness of the State Language, requires all mass media in Lithuania—including the press, television, radio, and other outlets—as well as all publishers of books and other publications to adhere to the norms for the correct use of Lithuanian. The law also mandates the use of Lithuanian in technology, science, and both educational and non-educational media and publications. These regulations underscore the significance of maintaining Lithuanian as the heritage language.

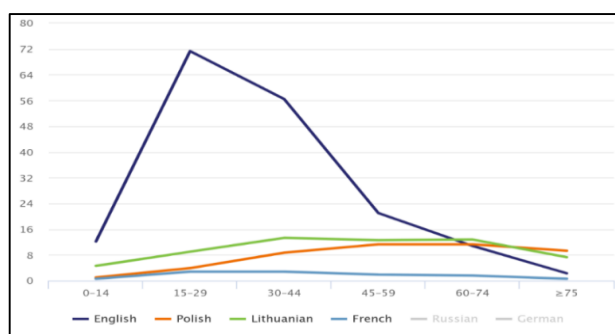
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Although Lithuania prioritizes the state language, language-use patterns are gradually changing in response to globalization and the growing role of English. The global spread of English has influenced language practices in Lithuania. Initially, most Lithuanians were monolingual in Lithuanian, as regulations required adherence to Lithuanian language norms. However, globalization has altered these patterns, resulting in the emergence of Lithuanian-English bilinguals. Ambrozaitienė (2011) notes that English has become one of the most popular languages in Lithuania, with usage reaching 80%. Additionally, Miskiniene and Otani (2021) report that formal foreign language training in primary schools has been implemented and is supported by the government for various purposes: As a means of communication, to develop linguistic competence, to support sociocultural and intercultural communication, and to use technology maximally for global information. The coexistence of English and Lithuanian has influenced people’s communication practices. This suggests that English is gaining prominence, while Lithuanian remains institutionally protected. This practice implies that Lithuania is becoming more globalized by supporting people’s linguistic competence and their sociocultural interaction.



Source: Lithuanian Department of Statistics



Source: Official Statistic Portal

**Figure 1.** English Dominance from 2011 in Lithuania

The use of English in Lithuania has increased, particularly among younger speakers. According to the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, 80% of Lithuanians use English, the highest among 15-19-year-olds. A decade later, new data reported on the Official Statistics Portal show that 71.3% of Lithuanians aged 15-29 use English. The diagrams (Figure 1) suggest that English plays an increasingly visible role in language practices in Lithuania. Vilnius University’s Language Policy Guidelines (2022) identify English as the main supplementary language for research and academics to support internationalization, a view also endorsed by Ramonienė et al. (2022): “*reikalingiausių svetimųjų kalbų laiko anglų... ir laikoma labai prestižine.*” (p. 93-94) (Translated: “the most necessary foreign language is English...and it is considered very prestigious.”).

English is highly valued in Lithuania as a language associated with opportunity, international mobility, and access to global communication. However, the growing prestige of English may create pressure on the functional use of Lithuanian in certain domains. Ozers (2025) warns that without active maintenance, Lithuanian can quickly lose its functional use. With English expected to grow even more in Lithuania, there are real concerns about Lithuanian’s continuity (Karczewska & Žeguniene, 2019). Preserving the heritage language is vital, even as global languages become more dominant. The following studies provide relevant perspectives on heritage language maintenance, language choice, and identity preservation.

Ding (2022) examines how families maintain heritage languages amid social, cultural, economic, and political pressures. Drawing on the frameworks of family language policy, marginalization, and vitality, the study examines how Hakka families approach language preservation. The research emphasizes the critical role of family and community support, and suggests that effective

heritage language maintenance, as observed in the Lithuanian-English context, depends on supportive policies and active community involvement.

Jumadi et al. (2024) examine language choices in multiethnic communities, taking into account cultural, social, and political influences. Their findings reveal that Banjar is predominantly spoken at home and in the community. The use of Dayak varies by family role, and Madurese is mainly used within families, shifting to Indonesian in broader social contexts. This research illustrates that language use is highly context-dependent and demonstrates adaptability within diverse communities. While Jumadi et al. analyze language use across the domains of family, education, and government, the current study will specifically address language patterns in the education, family, and community domains.

Previous research has established connections between language patterns, heritage language maintenance, and bilinguals' cultural identity. The present study addresses this gap by applying domain-based language-use analysis and language maintenance theory to Lithuanian-English bilinguals in Kaunas. Investigating heritage language and identity is particularly important in the context of global language dominance. Park (2013) advocates promoting language maintenance to safeguard heritage identity and warns that neglect may lead to language loss. Park further emphasizes the need for research on strategies to sustain both heritage language and cultural identity.

This study investigates language patterns among Lithuanian-English bilinguals in Lithuania and examine the relationships among language patterns, heritage language maintenance, and the preservation of bilingual identity. The research is guided by three primary objectives:

1. To describe language patterns shaped by Lithuanian-English bilinguals
2. To examine the heritage language maintenance through participants' language patterns
3. To explore identity preservation through participants' language maintenance

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Language Pattern and Domain

Bilingual individuals use two languages across different contexts, and their proficiency may influence how flexibly they move between languages. Language use varies by location, the people involved, and the topic (Rayo et al., 2024). Speakers often associate particular languages with specific settings, making language both a tool for communication and a marker of context.

Setiawan (2013) studied bilingual children in East Java, showing that their use of Indonesian and Javanese varies by region and is influenced by social networks and proficiency. He identifies three key domains for language use: school, community, and family. Indonesian is mainly used in formal school settings, while Javanese is common in informal, community contexts. In this research, Setiawan (2013) defines domain as,

In the wider scope in which context is formed, the term 'domain' is used...it implies that the language which is going to be chosen is governed by the domains of language use...[or]...where a given language is used to hold communication and one's social network. (Setiawan, 2013)

Setiawan's (2013) framework consists of three domains:

- a) Family: A primary domain of language, which involves communication among family members. For instance, parents and children use more prestigious language to form a global bond or as a means of modernization (Rose et al., 2023).
- b) Education: Language occurs in an educational environment. To illustrate, English has recently held a dominant role in academia, serving as a primary language in some study programs in Lithuania (Kriaučiūnienė & Šlikaitė, 2022; Andziulienė & Verikaitė-Gaigalienė, 2019).
- c) Community: Interaction within wider social networks. Usually, this domain uses the local language in casual conversations to emphasize solidarity and closeness (Yim & Clément, 2021).

This theory suggests that bilinguals use languages systematically within certain social domains—defined as institutionalized spheres of language use. Setiawan (2001, 2013) explains that language choice depends on the domain, with home, school, and community being primary examples. Patterns can involve consistently using one language or switching based on context (Cedden et al., 2024).

Code-switching refers to the alternation between languages within or across interactions, depending on context, interlocutor, and communicative purpose. For example, Norvilas (2007) notes that English might be used for casual conversations, while Lithuanian is reserved for certain situations, showing how speakers adapt their language choices. Jawad et al. (2025) find that code-switching is common in informal settings to promote humor and solidarity among friends. In family contexts, speakers often shift to their mother tongue to show respect to elders and reinforce cultural ties. When a single language dominates certain domains, especially a global language, people may lose touch with their heritage language and culture. Active maintenance of the heritage language helps prevent this cultural loss.

### **Heritage Language Use**

Utomo (2023) argues that people use different languages depending on the social context, with heritage languages mainly spoken at home. Most speakers use their first language in familiar, non-academic settings and use it less often with friends or the wider community. Heritage language practices involve using and transmitting the language within families and communities (Protassova & Yelenevskaya, 2025). Daily communication helps develop language skills and reflect cultural values. Key strategies include consistent use, creating a rich language environment, joining heritage language events, and fostering positive learning.

Alongside strategies for promoting heritage language, Park (2024) highlights key factors: strong family bonds, translating for parents, frequent use in both formal and informal settings, and positive attitudes toward preservation. High heritage language proficiency helps individuals understand their culture, belong to the community, and maintain social ties. Both studies show heritage language is mainly used in families and among friends, less so in the wider community. Ongoing preservation efforts are vital, as heritage language use is closely tied to cultural values and a sense of belonging. Muthuswamy (2023) finds that heritage languages, like Arabic in Arab families, are inherited from parents and spoken at home. Using a heritage language can strengthen family bonds, support well-being, reinforce cultural identity, and foster a sense of belonging. These findings align with earlier studies linking heritage language use to cultural identity.

### **Bilinguals Identity**

Gardner (1985) and Tannenbaum (2011) contend that bilinguals frequently navigate complex identities through language use across various contexts, as also observed by Amjad and Tayyab (2025). Distinct linguistic environments influence how bilinguals negotiate their identities. For example, bilinguals may acquire Lithuanian as a heritage language and English as a foreign language; this dual linguistic identity is shaped by language. Specifically, individuals may be locally anchored in a Lithuanian identity, while their global identity is mediated by English (Lūžys, 2021). Such dynamics can result in ongoing identity negotiation, with individuals often strongly identifying with the language that dominates their communication.

Phillipson (1992) argues that language shapes bilingual identity in line with global power dynamics, which may encourage speakers to identify with dominant language groups (Phillipson, 1992). It is also influenced by language choice (Norton, 1995), so one language may come to shape a bilingual's identity more than another. Amjad and Tayyab (2025) found that language is a key tool for self-presentation. Bilinguals choose languages depending on the social setting, using code-switching to mark identity. They may use dominant languages to appear fluent or intelligent and reserve heritage

languages for close or community settings. However, bilingualism can sometimes make heritage-language use feel less authentic, affecting connection to heritage identity.

### **Heritage Language Maintenance**

Fishman (1991) describes language maintenance as intentional, community-backed efforts to preserve heritage languages across generations and social settings. This requires families and communities to continually pass on minority languages, with family use at home being especially important—neglecting it often leads to language loss. Family is the strongest foundation for intergenerational language transmission. He also notes that language maintenance is more than preserving vocabulary or grammar—it also strengthens ethnic identity, cultural traditions, and emotional ties to heritage. Language maintenance has several strategies: Integrational continuity (e.g., used by parents to children —family domain), a stable use across domains (all domains, as mentioned by Setiawan (2013)), positive language attitudes (i.e., feelings, perceptions, and judgments of language), institutional support (such as schools, media, organizations), and literacy and modernization (e.g., keeping ourselves modern while also maintaining local culture through literacy). Hakuta and D’Andrea (1992) highlight that using the language at home strongly predicts language retention, linking maintenance to community unity, ethnic identity, and institutional support. The following studies expand on these points:

Alafifi (2025) shows that schools and community programs support heritage language maintenance through policies, community projects, media, and technology—for example, by using both English and the heritage language in schools or workplaces and by promoting bilingual education. On the other hand, Yuliana and Yanti (2023) find that family background, language use in different settings, and practical needs all affect whether heritage languages are maintained, with family background being especially important for Jakartan-Chinese Indonesians. Building on those studies, heritage language maintenance is vital for bilinguals. It not only preserves the language but also strengthens shared identity, cultural values and maintains social bonds.

### **Heritage Identity Preservation**

Banda et al. (2024) define identity preservation as the maintenance of heritage identity and the transmission of cultural values. Those who preserve their identity retain a strong sense of belonging despite cultural change or assimilation. Parajuli (2021) notes that contact with diverse groups can strengthen motivation to keep one’s language and culture, but adapting to new cultures requires actively maintaining heritage identity. For example, a bilingual American living in Indonesia may develop a layered identity—integrating into local life while maintaining ties to American heritage through English and cultural practices (Retnawati, 2018). Combining several studies conducted by Shermirzayeva (2025), Parajuli (2021), Hakim et al. (2025), there are several ways to preserve heritage identity, consisting of: Language maintenance (continually utilizing the heritage language), cultural practices (practicing the heritage culture and tradition), social networks (staying connected with the community), collective memory (transmitting cultural history), strengthening values and beliefs to show a positive attitude toward the heritage norms. These strategies can deepen the cultural connection between individuals and their identities.

Table 1 shows how language maintenance strategies relate to preserving heritage identity: Speaking the heritage language is a key way to preserve both language and cultural identity (Hakim et al., 2025). Regular use of the heritage language directly supports the maintenance of heritage identity. Shermirzayeva (2025) shows that language helps shape identity, cultural history, and social behavior, not just communication. Examples include Uzbekistan’s language policy, Korea’s Hangul Day, and Irish language immersion schools and media, all of which support identity through language. The study finds that identity is best preserved when the native language is actively used and promoted through education, media, and cultural initiatives. Without such support, cultural cohesion can weaken.

**Table 1.** *Connecting Language Maintenance and Identity Preservation*

| Language Maintenance         | Identity Preservation            | Connection  |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Intergenerational continuity | Collective memory                | Continually transmitting the language and cultural history to the next generation                                 |
| A stable use across domains  | Language maintenance             | Practicing language in all interactions to maintain the heritage language and preserve the heritage identity      |
| Positive language attitudes  | Strengthening values and beliefs | Showing positive attitudes towards language use to strengthen its cultural values tied to the identity            |
| Institutional support        | Cultural practices               | Institutions and communities are needed to maintain the language and preserve identity through cultural practices |
| Literacy and modernization   | Social networks                  | Practicing the language and culture with people to strengthen the connection aims to preserve heritage identity   |

As discussed, losing an ethnic language also means losing sociocultural identity and values, since language shapes both communication and a sense of belonging. While there are various ways to strengthen heritage identity, this study focuses specifically on how language maintenance supports its preservation.

## METHODS

### Design

Miles et al. (2014) present a concept called a case study. A qualitative case study allows researchers to explore participants' experiences, practices, and meanings within a bounded context. Primarily provides rich, detailed insights into the topic under investigation. The data for this research were obtained through interviews with selected participants, accompanied by secondary data from observations, which strengthen the interview results.

### Participants

The participants were three Lithuanian–English bilinguals, as described in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Participants' profile*

| P  | Age range | Gender (F/M) | First Language | Education/ Occupation | English Exposure                    | Lithuanian Use | Rationale   |
|----|-----------|--------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|---|
| P1 | 38-43     | Female       | Lithuanian     | A lecturer            | Teaching using the English language | Native Active  | A well-experienced bilingual English speaker who actively engaged with sociological teaching & learning |
| P2 | 17-22     | Male         | Lithuanian     | Undergraduate student | English language enthusiast         | Native Active  | A youth actively learns English   |
| P3 | 23-28     | Male         | Lithuanian     | Worker                | Actively using English              | Native Passive | Lived in UK<br>Actively using English   |

The investigation was conducted at one of the universities in Kaunas, Lithuania. Lithuania was selected because English has become increasingly important in education, work, and international communication, while Lithuanian remains central to national and heritage identity (Ramonienė et al., 2022).

### Data Collection

The data collection follows Miles et al. (2014); semi-structured interviews were the main data source, supplemented by classroom and interview-based observations for language use. Observations for P1 and P2 occurred in the classroom on the interview day, while P3 was observed during an

interview outside the classroom. Some observations were limited or conducted a day earlier due to various constraints. The researcher acted as a complete observer. However, the manuscript should clarify whether consent was obtained before or after observation. Interview questions and observational field notes are available in Appendix 1. The breakdown or protocol of each data collection is described as follows:

### ***Interview***

1. Deciding the topic and listing the RQ for open-ended questions
2. Deciding on the participants
3. Proposing an agreement
4. Deciding the place (each participant has a separate schedule)
5. Preparing for the instruments (question list, recorder)
6. Introducing the research purpose, as well as the role of the participant
7. Conducting & recording the interview
8. Finishing the interview session and debriefing script
9. Confirming the overall participants' answers
10. Storing the recording in a single data file

### ***Observation***

Deciding the topic (language pattern), deciding the participants (Table 2), deciding the place, preparing for the instruments (paper for the field notes, see Appendix 2), conducting the observation, informing participants about the observation and obtaining verbal consent (prior to the interview session), and storing the observation result in a single data file.

### **Data Analysis**

After data collection, the analysis follows the procedures outlined by Miles et al. (2014) for interviews and observations. This approach supports the study's goal of providing a descriptive analysis. The analysis and findings are grounded in the theories of Fishman (1991) on language and identity preservation and Setiawan (2013) on language patterns.

Each analyzed excerpt was given a letter code during the display: (N (number), S (number), D (number), which refers to the participant as the source of information. Meanwhile, for the data that has been gathered, the code of analysis matches the research question on, Lithuanian-English language pattern (domain, interlocutor, language, and topic), language maintenance, and identity. Data were analyzed through:

1. Triangulation: Multiple data sources (interviews and observations) were used to compare findings and strengthen data validity by identifying consistent patterns.
2. Audit trail: A transparent analysis process was maintained to show the dependability of conclusions and their link to the original data.
3. Verbatim quotation: Direct quotes from participants ensured transparency, accuracy, and provided key evidence for descriptive validity.

### **Ethical Consideration and Data Protection**

All participants were informed about the study purpose, their voluntary participation, the use of field notes, and the recording of interviews for research purposes, and the approval and use of interview recordings for research purposes. Verbal consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interview session. Participants' personal information was protected by assigning pseudonyms. Interview recordings and transcriptions will be used exclusively for research purposes and will not be disclosed to third parties.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Lithuanian-English Language Patterns

#### *Domain-based Language*

Lithuanian–English bilinguals switched between languages depending on interlocutor and topic. This section explores how participants use Lithuanian and English with family, friends, and in educational settings as part of their daily lives.

*D01: “In my professional life, English is the dominant—.”*

*D02: “In everyday life—it’s still Lithuanian—”*

The first participant explains that English is used dominantly only in a professional setting, as stated in (D01), which is in the education domain—the place of her job as a lecturer. English is used to conduct class activities and to communicate with students and other lecturers, as it is the medium of instruction at the university.

On the other hand, in the family domain, she uses both Lithuanian and English with other family members. As expressed in *D03* “because my kids—they are switching me also to English.” In addition to the family domain, P1 used both Lithuanian and English in the community domain. English was used when she interacted with non-Lithuanian speakers or interlocutors who were more comfortable using English, as illustrated in *D04*: “We have some friends—we are talking in English.” This finding suggests that English functioned as a practical lingua franca in multilingual interaction, supporting previous work on how multilingual interlocutors use shared communicative resources to maintain interaction across linguistic differences (Soegiono et al., 2021).

In addition to P1, another similar practice is observed in P2:

*S11: “In school I talked with my friends in Lithuanian—.”*

*S13: “If they can speak a Lithuanian native language, then I’ll speak to them in Lithuanian too—I would talk at first to them in English—”*

In community and educational settings, P2 uses both Lithuanian and English, depending on the interlocutor. The data show that his friends are mostly non-native Lithuanians, and he uses Lithuanian mainly for strong words or only with Lithuanian speakers. Overall, English is P2’s dominant language.

In contrast to P1 and P2, P3 demonstrates a distinct pattern:

*N01: “I use both Lithuanian and English from my parents—when I’m ordering in cafes—if I’m doing a phone call, I’ll write down my conversation in Lithuanian beforehand.”*

*N02: “— to my Lithuanian friends, we all use English—we use Lithuanian if we’re just making an inside joke—”*

While P3 tries to use both languages in family and community settings, P1 mainly uses English at work, but Lithuanian at home and in the community. P2 prefers English, especially in educational and community contexts.

#### *Language Dominance*

After recognizing participants’ language patterns in three domains, they are asked about their most dominant language use in everyday life. It appears that English is the most used language in all interactions by P3, as mentioned in *N03* “Definitely English—most of my Lithuanian learning came from folk music.” English is his primary language because he grew up in an English-speaking country. Despite this, he tries to use both English and Lithuanian in all domains. While he didn’t specify educational language use, data suggest he used English in school, as he attended public school in the UK.

Likewise, P1 considers Lithuanian essential, although English is becoming more prominent for her. *D05* “—English is more and more in my everyday life, but still Lithuanian is...dominant to use.” When P1 and P3 are dominated by the primary language they use in everyday life, P2 seems to be influenced by the global language. Leading to his exposure to the English language. Mentioned in (*S01*) “Casually with my family, I use Lithuanian—English in classes—the current friends that I have are foreigners—So English currently.”

The participant used both languages in *community* and educational domains. This suggests that English is dominant, with Lithuanian appearing mainly in the family domain. All participants have similar patterns, although the degree of language dominance varies. Table 4 presents the domain-based language patterns and language dominance, as outlined by Setiawan (2013):

**Table 3.** *Language pattern-based interview of all participants*

| Participants | Domains               |                       |                       | Dominant         |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|              | Family                | Education             | Community             |                  |
| P1           | Lithuanian<br>English | English               | Lithuanian<br>English | Lithuanian (D05) |
| P2           | Lithuanian            | Lithuanian<br>English | Lithuanian<br>English | English (S01)    |
| P3           | Lithuanian<br>English | English               | Lithuanian<br>English | English (N03)    |

Some domains are “unavailable” due to unexpected issues or limited access to observations.

**Table 4.** *Observation sheet of language and domain*

| P  | Domains                   | Interlocutors          | Language           | Topic/situation                 |
|----|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| P1 | Education                 | Students               | English            | Teaching activity               |
|    | Family                    | Kids                   | English            | Phone call                      |
|    | Community                 | Lecturer (Friend)      | English            | Conversation                    |
| P2 | Education                 | Lecturer<br>Classmates | English<br>English | Class discussion                |
|    | Family                    | UNAVAILABLE            |                    |                                 |
|    | Community                 | Friends/peer           | Lithuanian         | Casual conversation             |
| P3 | Education                 | UNAVAILABLE            |                    |                                 |
|    | Family                    |                        |                    |                                 |
|    | Community<br>(Friendship) | Girlfriend<br>Friends  | English<br>English | Casual conversation<br>Greeting |
|    | Community                 | Worker                 | Lithuanian         | Ordering food                   |

Table 5 shows that P1 uses English consistently across the education, family, and community domains—for teaching, family interactions, and conversations with friends. While English dominates, P1 considers Lithuanian her primary language in daily life, with English used primarily professionally. These patterns align with interview data showing P1 uses English with her children, in class, and with friends. P2’s observations suggest English is his dominant language, used for class and most activities. Lithuanian is mainly reserved for family and local friends. In the community, P2 starts conversations in English. These findings match the interview data.

P3’s language pattern is only partially observable, but in the community, he uses English, which aligns with his interview responses. Local interlocutors often switch to Lithuanian, showing that both languages are used. Even though education and family domains weren’t observed, P3 identifies English as his dominant language, citing his UK background. Overall, participants use both Lithuanian and English, with some domains showing a clear preference for one language and others showing frequent code-switching. These findings suggest that English was becoming more common among the observed participants, particularly in educational and community interactions, especially in education, reflecting a shift from Lithuanian monolingualism to Lithuanian-English bilingualism. These patterns will be further analyzed using Fishman’s (1991) language maintenance theory and is consistent with Soegiono et al. (2021), who highlight the role of shared communicative resources in multilingual interaction.

## Lithuanian Identity Meaning

Analysis shows participants choose languages based on context: P1 uses English for instruction, P2 prefers English in most domains, and P3, citing familiarity, also identifies English as his primary language. All are Lithuanian and fluent in English. Given their heritage identity and evolving use of English, it's important to explore how they define their identities before discussing heritage language maintenance and identity preservation. This section focuses on identity-related data.

One participant notes that his identity remains rooted in Lithuania despite mainly using English. He shows respect for other Lithuanians by speaking their native language, as seen in (S13) above. Although the participant starts conversations in English, he switches to Lithuanian to show respect, affirming his Lithuanian identity despite English's dominance. Similarly, another participant continues to develop their identity while living outside Lithuania. As mentioned in (N03), the participant still has a strong desire to learn Lithuanian. It suggests the participant's desire to rebuild his Lithuanian identity through Lithuanian arts. Further, he mentioned in (N08) regarding his belonging (N08) “—I'm a family of immigrants living illegally in the UK—I grew up in a public school.”

Participants' identities are closely tied to their language use and dominance. For instance, in (S13), it starts in English and switches to Lithuanian, reflecting English as his dominant language. Similarly, in (N03) and (N08), they identify as Lithuanian but have adopted English as their main language because they live in the UK and need it for daily life. Therefore, even though English dominates and continues to grow, participants' Lithuanian identity still holds essential value because it is their heritage language and identity. The domination of English does not diminish the role of Lithuanian as its heritage language.

## Heritage Language Maintenance

Heritage language practice supports the maintenance of language and identity, as described by Fishman (1991). The strategies for maintaining heritage language are examined below:

*D10: “—It's very rich, because then you read books [maintaining the language]—the meanings of the words, they are so wide—I really love my language [Lithuanian].”*

*S08: “—“—I'm doing a homework—in Lithuanian—maintaining my native language by speaking with my family—I listen to Lithuanian song—”*

Participants maintain their heritage language by using it with family, in the media, and in interactions with non-family members. They also practice Lithuanian in institutional settings, as their university uses it as a medium of instruction (S09). This indicates that maintenance strategies included engagement with Lithuanian media, such as songs and books (D10). These findings show that heritage language maintenance goes beyond conversation. It helps preserve the heritage language.

Participants expressed strong respect and affection for the Lithuanian language. This means they preserve the language and its culture. As emphasized in (D22) “...the history of the Lithuanian language, which the local people want to maintain their Lithuanian language.” Lithuanian remains the primary language, especially among older generations who value the country's history. The analysis shows that they employ various strategies to preserve Lithuanian, as outlined in Fishman's (1991) framework, including intergenerational continuity, a stable use across domains, positive language attitudes, institutional support, and literacy and modernization, i.e. books and songs.

Intergenerational continuity refers to the transmission of Lithuanian from parents to children, as evidenced by all participants using it with their parents. Participants also use Lithuanian consistently across family, community, and educational settings. Positive attitudes are reflected in their respect for the language, while institutional support comes from its use in universities and organizations. All participants engage with Lithuanian media, including songs and books, thereby demonstrating media literacy. These findings are consistent with Ding's (2022) argument that supportive family, community, and policy environments are important for heritage language maintenance. The study

highlights the need for supportive policies and community environments to sustain heritage language use across all domains.

### **Identity Preservation**

According to Fishman (1991), heritage language maintenance is closely tied to cultural identity. Speakers who seek to maintain their heritage language and identity often continue using the language in everyday life, making language preservation a sign of identity maintenance. Despite English's dominance, the Lithuanian language and culture continue to be preserved. Participants are therefore asked about their perceptions of identity when using both Lithuanian and English. D23 "I have no cultural or social identification with the English language. So, I don't consider it as a part of my identity at all." P1 exhibits neither social nor cultural identification with the English language, despite its growing presence in daily life and multiple interactional contexts. According to (D10), the participant demonstrates a strong appreciation for her heritage language and a deep respect for Lithuanian history. These factors shape her social identity and contribute to her limited connection with English. The participant's use of English is primarily driven by external demands, including institutional requirements, communication with non-native speakers, and the pervasive influence of social media, which collectively necessitate its use (see Data D01, D03, D04).

P1 values her heritage language for its connection to Lithuanian culture, despite English's globalization. This suggests that P1 is not entirely influenced by English culture; consequently, the Lithuanian heritage language remains central to her sense of belonging. As noted in (D24) "I believe that Lithuanian is very beautiful. And it's important to me—I will never think like a native English. I always gonna think like Lithuanian." Although English is continually growing, she does not feel a sense of English culture. She preserves her Lithuanian identity rather than fully assimilating. This aligns with statements in (D10) "—I really love my language", and in (D24) "—It's important to me."

Another participant described different experiences and perceptions, initially struggling with identity in both languages. P3 explains that his Lithuanian identity was gradually overshadowed by English dominance, preventing its expression due to societal stigma. Despite that, he still reconstructs Lithuanian identity through Lithuanian media and the use of English, as in N10 "I—trying to search for my Lithuanian identity through songs—" It shows that he openly reconstructs his Lithuanian identity, using the media. He continues to use English as a tool to reconnect with his heritage. As mentioned (N11) "So, learning English made me want to learn a lot more about Lithuanian culture—Lithuanian identity has been built up a lot more. So, there's a lot more unity—" It highlights P3's use of English to motivate the preservation of his Lithuanian heritage. The sense of disconnection from English prompted him to engage more deeply with Lithuanian culture to strengthen his cultural ties. It highlights the participant's ongoing efforts to preserve and reshape his Lithuanian heritage.

Overall, the participants demonstrated respect for their heritage identity and engaged in practices that supported its preservation. Importantly, they do not associate any cultural identification with English, viewing it solely as a societal tool for communication. In alignment with the findings of Shermirzayeva (2025), Parajuli (2021), and Hakim et al. (2025), participants employ several strategies to maintain their heritage identity, including language maintenance, cultural practices, social networks, collective memory, and strengthening values to show a positive attitude toward the heritage norms. Participants use several strategies to preserve their heritage identity: maintaining the Lithuanian language, continuing cultural traditions, staying connected with community members, transmitting collective memory and history (S08 and D22), and expressing positive attitudes toward Lithuanian culture (D24, D25, N12).

With that in mind, maintaining language is closely linked to preserving heritage identity, as it involves ongoing language use, cultural practices, and positive attitudes. Scholars also argue that language is central to identity and culture preservation (Fishman, 1991; Hakuta & D'Andrea, 1992; Jawad et al., 2025; Muthuswamy, 2023; Norton, 1995; Parajuli, 2021; Park, 2013; Protassova & Yelenevskaya, 2025; Phillipson, 1992; Setiawan, 2013; Shermirzayeva, 2025; Utomo, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the participants used Lithuanian and English across family, education, and community domains. English was dominant for P1 in professional and educational contexts, for P2 in educational and peer interactions, and for P3 in most observed or reported domains, but Lithuanian use signals heritage language maintenance. The observed strategies illustrate how the participants maintained Lithuanian and preserved heritage identity despite the growing role of English. Although English is widely used, Lithuanian remains the key marker of identity, highlighting the high value participants place on heritage.

These findings provide insight into real-world patterns of bilingual language use and suggest strategies for heritage language maintenance amid global language dynamics. Future research should examine how language use shapes belonging, cultural perception, and identity formation among a larger and more diverse group of Lithuanian–English bilinguals, clarifying each language’s role in identity formation and enriching discussions of heritage language and identity.

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## APPENDIX 1. Observation field notes

### Language use by participant Fieldwork

Date : 6 November 2024  
 Name : Daira (Lecturer)  
 Location : Cultural diversity class -  
 Vytautas Magnus university

1. Participant uses English with all students during the class.
2. Participant receive a phone call from her kids (mention this to all students) and still uses English largely.
3. After the class, talk with some students still use English.
4. Talk with another lecturer about switching class which English.

#### Overall finding

Participant uses English for all interlocutors (i.e., student, lecturer, kids). Even the same Lithuanian. (RV uses English).

### Language use Fieldwork

Date : 12 December 2024  
 Name : Nedas (worker)  
 Location : Cafe, Kaunas city.

1. Greeting using English with me
2. Using English with his girlfriend by conversation
3. Ordering food using Lithuanian
4. His friends came, they greet each other using English (same Lithuanian)
5. Using Lithuanian with one of the worker in cafe.

#### Overall finding

Participant uses English with friend even with the same Lithuanian. However change to Lithuanian when participant ordering food and when talking with someone older than one of the worker in cafe.

### Fieldwork

#### Language use

Date : 8 November 2024  
 Name : Simonas (student)  
 Location : Cultural diversity class,  
 Vytautas Magnus university.

1. Greeting the class using English (late came late)
2. Talk with me using English
3. Using English with lecturer -  
 The lecturer is Lithuanian.
4. Communicating with other students using English.
5. Talk with female Lithuanian student using Lithuanian. (when they made coffee in vending machine)

#### Overall finding

Participant uses English during the class even with the same Lithuanian. However, shift to Lithuanian outside the class, only with Lithuanian student.