

CHANGING ATTITUDES: MELTING POT VS. MOSAIC – RAISING CHILDREN IN A DUAL CULTURE

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1. Background

“Melting Pot” – pre-WWII

Many immigrants came to the USA mainly due to economic reasons. The “melting pot” was the accepted cultural norm. Most immigrants did not pass on their native language past the 2nd/3rd generations. However;

They did lay the foundation for the following generations by establishing strong ethnic communities through churches, language schools, cultural and other organizations.

“Mosaic” – post-WWII

Most immigrants came to the USA due to political reasons. The “mosaic” became the accepted cultural norm. Immigrants are passing on their native language past the 2nd / 3rd generations.

Hopefully, the following will give some insight, information and useful tips on raising children in a bilingual environment.

Personal

I was born and raised in Cleveland as part of the “mosaic” generation. My parents came to the USA in 1951 and my husband, Paul’s parents came to the USA in 1956. We spoke exclusively Hungarian at home before learning English and our strong family and overall ties to the Hungarian community helped us to remain bilingual (church, Hungarian School, Hungarian Scouting, friends).

Research performed (*direct and indirect*)

Web articles and personal experiences were used when compiling information. Unfortunately and surprisingly, my local library did not have many resources.

Bilingualism is neither rare nor unusual. More than half the world's population (est. 2/3) is bilingual (Harding and Riley, 1990) and research has shown that the benefits of being bilingual are great, not only in terms of job opportunities and increased cultural awareness, but in terms of social and cognitive development. Children who learn to speak more than one language learn to “play with language.” They learn that the same thing can have different names and this early lesson in abstraction gives bilingual people the mental flexibility and openness that produces cognitive and social benefits. The ability to switch linguistic codes and eventually think in more than one language increases conceptual development. However, some researchers are very concerned that because the pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture is so great, young children are not learning the language of their own families. We will try to touch on these aspects of raising children in a dual and bilingual culture.

Personal experiences

Our own childhoods and raising our two daughters gives us firsthand experience as well as our participation in numerous scout camps and teaching in Hungarian School. Paul’s work experience at a multi-national company also gives him insight into bilingualism in the work-force.

2. Definitions and Terms

Culture – 1. the quality in a person or society that arises from an interest in and acquaintances with what is generally regarded as excellence in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc.

2. that which is excellent in the arts, manners, etc. 3. *Sociol.* the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.

Language – 1. a body of words and systems for their use common to a people of the same community or nation, the same geographical area, or the same cultural tradition 2. any set or system of such symbols as used in more or less uniform fashion by a number of people, who are thus able to communicate intelligibly with one another.

Bilingualism

1. able to speak two languages with nearly equal facility. **2.** spoken or written in two languages (*The Random House College Dictionary*)

Uriel Weinreich, one of the "fathers" of bilingual studies and a bilingual himself offered the most famous definition in his renowned book *Languages in Contact: "The practice of alternately using two languages will be called BILINGUALISM, and the person involved, BILINGUAL".* (1926–68, Polish-American linguist, b. Vilnius, Poland (now in Lithuania), Ph.D. Columbia Univ., 1951)

Leonard Bloomfield (1935: 55-56) added the notion of a certain "degree of perfection" in bilingualism, and William Mackey (1957: 51) incorporates Weinreich's alternate use of two languages into Bloomfield's reservations with regard to the degree of proficiency.

Other terms often used

"Early/child bilingualism" vs. "late bilingualism" (can be "natural" or "artificial")

A child who has been in contact with two languages from birth, and also to the child who acquired a second language in early childhood, but after the first language had already been established.

Late bilingualism may be the result either of acquisition in a natural environment or artificial; the result of second language learning, as with the person who has studied for years, using graded language-teaching materials, attending courses, etc.

"Natural (primary) bilingualism" vs. "achieved (secondary) bilingualism"

The first term refers to when the child acquires two languages from the speakers around him/her in an unstructured way. The process involves no teaching and no learning. Achieved is therefore the opposite.

"Receptive" vs. "Productive" bilingualism

Those who understand a language — either spoken or written — but cannot produce it themselves are receptive bilinguals, and those who can do both are productive bilinguals.

Fluency

Most parents are satisfied if their child understands and speaks a foreign language. But, how well? Fluency isn't something that's engraved in stone. There are degrees of fluency from rudimentary knowledge to native speaker. There is active vs. passive knowledge, and there are levels of partial literacy through to full literacy. Verbal and literary skills have been divided into five groups:

Verbal Skills

1. Passive - understands spoken language but isn't able to reply.
2. Basic - can speak and play with other children.
3. Intermediate - can speak with adults in the minority language.
4. Advanced - child speaks well enough to go to school.
5. Native - child's ability to speak language is indistinguishable from monolingual children of same age.

Literary Skills

1. Passive - understands written language but is not able to write.
2. Basic - can read fairly well but has only basic writing skills.
3. Intermediate - can read and write well but not as well as peers of the same age.
4. Advanced - can read and write well enough to go to school.
5. Native - child's ability to write is indistinguishable from monolingual children of same age.

Between these definitions lie worlds. Learning is a life-long process in our constantly changing world. Therefore, bilingualism, too, is a process, not a result. So why do we want our children to become bilingual? Some of these reasons and benefits are covered next.

3. Reasons and Benefits

Reasons

"I want another language for my sons so they will be one step ahead in school."

"We want to share the culture and heritage of our native country with our kids."

"We'd like her to be able to play and talk to her cousins and Grandma when they visit."

"Spanish is necessary if you're going to live in California, and to make the study load less difficult while going through school, children may as well be learning now."

"The best job opportunities are always for those who can both speak and write in both languages."

"We hope for her to be able to read and write in two of the three languages, but we'll see what happens."

Language is the most effective way of bridging the "analytical" and "emotional" aspects of culture and multi-generations. Your reasons may be similar or different, but whatever your motivation may be we should learn the many benefits that bilingualism offers.

Benefits

Communication - Bilingualism enables the child to communicate with all members of the close and extended family as well as with friends. This helps developing a good family cohesion and building relationships. Bilingualism allows greater flexibility to choose a place to live and work.

Cultural - As language is part of culture, Bilingualism develops a broader cultural understanding and multicultural sensitivity, greater tolerance and social harmony.

Cognitive - Research shows that learning and use of more than one language enhances problem solving and analytical skills, allows better formation of concepts, increases visual-social abilities, furthers logical reasoning and supports cognitive flexibility.

Personal - Bilingualism also helps to stimulate creativity, raise self-esteem, increase flexibility and adaptability, enhance interpersonal and social skills and develop greater social sensitivity.

Curriculum - The understanding and development of concepts in more than one language allows the transfer of academic skills across the languages. Bilingualism facilitates collaborative and cooperative learning within a language-diverse environment. Languages can be chosen as subjects at schools or universities.

4. Myths vs. Facts

Myth - *Learning two languages in childhood is difficult, can result in delays in language development, and you will confuse a child by raising it with two or more languages.*

Fact - Children who have regular and rich exposure to both languages on a daily or weekly basis from parents and other caregivers exhibit the same milestones in language development and at

roughly the same ages as monolingual children. The same kinds of differences in the milestones of language acquisition are characteristic of bilingual and monolingual children. This myth is based on old beliefs prevalent in monolingual countries. Many decades of research have shown that children can cope with 2 or more languages – such as in Canada, Belgium, Switzerland and Finland. There is no scientific evidence to date that hearing two or more languages leads to delays or disorders in language acquisition. Many, many children throughout the world grow up with two or more languages from infancy without showing any signs of language delays or disorders. These children provide visible proof that there is no causal relationship between a bilingual environment and language learning problems.

Myth – The mixing of languages by children is a sign of confusion and real bilinguals never mix their languages.

Fact- Most linguists agree that this is not true. Yes, some mixing will occur, but it is both harmless and temporary. When learning more than one language, a child is bound to mix the two initially. This is perfectly normal. The child is still busy trying to make sense of the language patterns. The language mixing will probably occur in a series of stages. For example: At first the child may draw words from both languages and use them as one language, as they lack sufficient vocabulary; then later they may use the structure of one with the words of the other. Adult bilinguals can also sometimes throw the odd word or expression (type it down) (its freeze point) in from the other language. As the child increases her vocabulary in each language, this phenomenon automatically disappears. Of course, the less you mix the languages yourself and the more consistent you are when speaking to your child, the less your child will mix.

Myth - Bilingualism is an exception.

Fact - Monolingualism is the exception. Estimates suggest that 75% of the world's population speaks more than one language. That means that despite the fact that most western cultures are monolingual, the majority of the world is multilingual. Many children learn one or more regional or tribal language at the same time they learn the official language of the country where they live.

Myth – Bilinguals have to translate from their weaker to their stronger language.

Fact - The overwhelming majority of bilinguals can think in either of their two languages. They do not, as some monolinguals assume, think in one language only and immediately translate into the other language when necessary.

Myth – One language should be properly acquired before starting another.

Fact - This is another misconception brought about by the same erroneous studies performed in the first half of the last century on American immigrants. These studies were negatively biased against immigrants and therefore invalidated later on. Quite the opposite is true: The easiest way for a child to learn two languages is from birth. Therefore, the earlier one starts the better. Since a newborn baby is potentially (biologically) capable of learning any sound in any language (a faculty that disappears with age), they will assimilate AS NORMAL any language spoken to them from birth. This innate capacity diminishes with age and that is why an older child will have a harder time learning another language. So don't leave it until they go to school, thinking this will help them.

Myth – A language is nothing more than a language.

Fact – As language is the means of communication it is heavily involved with culture. Language learning means understanding the culture the language belongs to as well. Language is tied to emotions and if you address your children in different languages, some of your children may feel excluded.

Myth – A bilingual child will end up feeling divided by and caught between two cultures.

Fact - This is not the case as adult bilinguals will tell you. As long as they are exposed to both cultures in a balanced and natural way - such as when their parents are at ease with their different cultures - both will become part of their identity, which will be all the richer for it. This does not mean that they will bind the two cultures into one, but that they will adopt whichever is necessary according to the cultural expectations of the person or situation.

Myth - You should stop if your pediatrician tells you it's not a good idea

Fact - Well, this depends. If there are legitimate developmental concerns, always consult a specialist. Most pediatricians only received training in language development for monolinguals, and in most countries, this aspect of a physician's training is minimal. Chances are, your pediatrician is no expert on linguistics research, bilingualism, or multilingual child development and is operating only from opinions, just as someone outside the medical field.

Remember that whatever advice others give you, you are ultimately responsible. Reason and hard facts generally stand the test of time better than mere opinions about your child's well-being.

Other Interesting facts

Korean children

Researchers Campbell and Lindholm (1987) report that by the age of five, Korean immigrant children achieve higher proficiency in their native tongue than adult graduates of an intensive Korean-as-a-second-language program run by the U.S. military. Developing heritage language resources would be far more efficient, not to mention more economical, than trying to create them from scratch.

ABC's, vocabulary, census, degradation

Researchers have found that knowing the names of the letters in the alphabet is the best indicator of good literacy skills. The more words children know, the better they will learn to speak and the better their chances of doing well in school. According to the 2004 US Census; 17.9% of the US population above the age 5 speak another language other than English at home; and 117,975 people in the US speak Hungarian. According to Professor Clara Thurner, there is a 1% degradation of language skills per month if particular language is not used at all.

5. Strategies and Steps for successful implementation

Strategies

It is important to discuss the following strategies with all family members (including grandparents, brothers, sisters etc.) and find a joint decision. It is very important to stick to one strategy as early as possible in the child's life:

One Person - one language

This means that the parents or caregiver consistently speak only one language each to the child. Since each parent speaks in his/her language with the child, the child is able to develop a "single-language" relationship to each parent. (*my brother and sister-in-law*) It is among the most widely used language systems to raise bilingual and multilingual children. Despite its popularity, the method often requires some "language supplement". Examples are playgroups, visiting family or the country, native speaking nanny or au-pair, etc. Regardless, it is always good for the child to hear the language from more than one person. As a reference, researchers suggest that a child needs to hear a language at least 30% of the waking time to learn to speak with ease.

Minority language at home (and in public) - ML@H

This is also known as the Foreign Home pattern. With this method everyone speaks the minority language at home, and the majority (or community) language is used with everyone else. The minority language does not have to be the native language of both parents. As a family language system it is probably the most fail safe method to raise truly native speaking children, because the child will hear and interact in the language with both parents consistently from birth until they leave home.

If you decide to speak the minority language at home, but not in public, your child might feel that this language is not being good enough to be spoken in public. This may affect the child's

identification with the minority language. Trust your multicultural community's ability to deal with many languages.

ML@H requires very strong nerves by the parents, since the child may not catch up with his monolingual peers in the majority language until around 5 years of age or when she starts school/preschool. (Hanna's example at preschool) It is understandable that parents worry about their child having a disadvantage when starting school, but as soon as the child is surrounded by children speaking the community language, he will quickly catch up. If he has the basics in place, that catch up period is rarely more than 6 months. Some parents opt to temporarily change to one of them speaking the community language a year or so before school, just to prepare the child for the change. Once the child is in school, they switch back to ML@H. (Although once the shift has been made, it is VERY difficult to go back.)

Both parents – both languages

This strategy is confusing and lacks consistency as parents choose the language according to their needs. Since the majority language naturally dominates and because this strategy is inconsistent from the child's perspective, it does not lead to good results.

Minority language is only spoken occasionally

The minority language is only spoken at special occasions, at certain times and/or special places.

STEPS – When and how to start

Don't Wait!! The ideal time to start multilingualism is even before your baby is born.

Recently, with the help of modern technology, researchers have been able to see what's going on inside the head of infants. As it turns out, a baby knows important things about language even before birth, and he gains fundamental verbal skills long before he utters his first word. So, why is it a bad idea to postpone it? There is a certain period between 0-3 years of age when nature has primed the brain with a peak number of synapses busily setting up the optimal neural pathways for mediating language. This amazing ability gradually decreases until six or seven years. After that, children become mere mortals like adults, having to actually *study* pronunciation, vocabulary halting grammar when learning new languages. Even if you don't start from birth, the earlier is truly easier for both you and your child. Besides, the younger the child, the less likely they will care about blatant errors. They'll just happily chatter away until your ears are ready to fall off. What better learning conditions can you ask for?

When your child is settled in your family language and you want to prepare him/her for the English-speaking environment in general or its start with school, you need to introduce English later than the family language (Hanna & Julia in preschool) Introducing or reintroducing the family language later than English is possible, but quite difficult.

Stick to your chosen strategy (ML@H) for your family language and let others teach your child English and expose your child to English in the following settings:

- on playgrounds
- in playgroups
- meeting with English speaking friends
- in childcare

Set your goal; declare your intentions and agree on multilingualism

Decide what bilingualism suits your child and your family situation. Would you like to have your children just understand the family language or enable them to speak, read and/or write it as well?

Before your baby is born, everyone will have an opinion about the names you're considering for your little one. Once the name is given, most people drop the subject. The same is true of multilingualism. Everyone will no doubt have an opinion before you start, but once you begin, they will just accept it. The best tactic is simply to inform them of your decision. We've found it's better to never open the door for negotiations -- Most opposition you encounter can be politely

ignored with a nod or a smile. You might simply say, "That's interesting" or "That's a good point." If it's someone whose opinion you really care about, gently educate them. Well-informed explanations will go a long way. Dispelling common myths on multilingualism and showing them the advantages instead, should help you persuade them.

Most families that have the opportunity to raise a bilingual or multilingual child can come to an amicable agreement whether to pursue it or not. But, sometimes we are asked, "What do I do if my partner isn't supportive of me speaking my native language to our child?" This is very sad but also understandable. There can be a fear of being left out, not knowing "the secret language", or concerns if it's good for the child. There is a wealth of information you can access when arguing your case. Some keep going despite lack of support. Wanting to speak to your child in your native language is something your child will benefit from. And in the meantime, your significant other may well come around. Most couples find a way that's acceptable to all parties, as well as beneficial for the child.

Stick to your Commitment

If you speak in a language other than English, stick to it! Be persistent, perseverant and patient.

Encourage them to use it in all of their communication with you. Discourage their use of another language with you by asking them to repeat or by gently offering them the appropriate words in the language you want them to use. It is no crueler than asking your child to say "please" before giving her a cookie.

During the teenage years, it may seem a little more difficult to enforce the chosen strategy with respect to bilingualism, but this is no different than the other questioning and rebelling that typically happens during this time. If a strong base was established before your child reaches this stage in life, then your child will come to see the value of multilingualism and multiculturalism as they mature.

Decide on a Language System (that we've covered above)

Give Lots of Encouragement and Use Frequent Repetition

Use Different Means

Having books, music, movies, computer software and toys in your minority language is both fun and useful. Use them. Create language games according to your child's development.

Make your own collection of rhymes and riddles that you can use over and over again. Investigate if cable or satellite TV channels are available in the language of choice, for example Duna TV from Hungary.

Cover Many Different Topics

Talk about everything. Find out how things work and encourage your child to ask questions (and take the time to answer them, too). Knowledge, skills and concepts learnt in one language can easily be transferred into another language. But if no concepts are learned in the minority language, the vocabulary and literacy of the child will be very limited. Match up the child's vocabulary in the other language in your language. Speak with your child about what is happening outside of the home in the family language.

Speak Your Language Properly

Parents and other adults are role models for their children's language behavior. Talk about your life, about what you see, feel, want, like and share your thoughts. Speak your language well. Use the appropriate names and make whole, short sentences. Develop your own language skills by reading, talking and writing in your language.

And please, don't mix your languages!

Have a Broad Range of Conversation Partners

Show the child that other people speak your language, too. We took our daughter to Hungary when she was 4 ½ years old and she was amazed that "everyone speaks Hungarian here!" and that "I can understand everyone!"

The child needs to hear the language from many different speakers (old, young, male and female voices, various accents and dialects, different media like phone, radio, tape). Enlist the help of family members of your language, like grandparents.

Mix with other people who speak your language in different situations and environment. The child learns how adults communicate while listening to communication between same language speakers.

Get your support from others like you. Most things are more fun and rewarding if you share them with like-minded people. Not only do you have a peer group to discuss the art of raising multilingual children and benefit from the experiences of others, but you will also build a network of other speakers of your minority language. Equally important, it gives your child the opportunity to hear, speak, and interact with other children in the minority language. This is an enormous motivator for them (this time, group pressure actually works in your favor!) Playgroups are among the best and easiest ways to do it. They may even remain friends with a few of the kids for a long time. Play friends are probably the best way to ensure continuous language exposure over the years -- especially when Mom and Dad lose the coolness factor.

This is where Hungarian Scouting and Hungarian School play another vital role. Also, lifelong friendships are formed through the many camps and events.

Take your language to school

Let teachers, other parents, and children in your child's school know what language your family speaks and be willing to share your knowledge with the students.

6. Personal Experiences

Childhood

Growing up we spoke strictly Hungarian at home and with our family, but as older children, and teens, we spoke English with our Hungarian peers. We attended Hungarian church and Sunday school (1 hr), Hungarian School (2 hrs), Hungarian Scouts (2 hrs), Hungarian Scout Folk Ensemble (2 hrs). In estimation, we spent about 28 hrs./week total in a Hungarian environment (incl. the time we spent at home speaking Hungarian with our families). That is roughly 25% of our total time awake per week. We also participated in many Scouting/Folk Ensemble weekend activities.

“Defining moments” as teens & adults

- At many International folk and harvest festivals most people regret not learning their heritage language and fault their parents and/or grandparents for not passing it on to them
- Feeling a strong pride in speaking Hungarian fluently and being part of an over 1,000 year culture and history
- Growing up, we often had to choose between extracurricular activities--sports/scouting/etc.
- We noticed language degradation in Hungarian after 1 year of dating and knew that we both wanted to “pass it on”, so we better use the language more
- Being able to converse as “natives” in Hungary and Transylvania (Romania) and really “connecting” with the culture and heritage when scouting restarted in Hungary, Transylvania, etc. showed us that it is really worth all the work
- Paul has often used his Hungarian language skills and cultural experiences to bridge communication “gaps” in the work environment (Knorr-Bremse)

Daily life with own children

- From day one we spoke exclusively Hungarian at home and in everyday activities like shopping, etc.
- We translated English books as we read them to our daughters; translated flashcards and books with only illustrations (Rain, Snowman)
- We formed playgroups with bilingual peers instead of participating in local English language pre-school playgroups
- Hanna’s experience in Hungary when she was 4 ½ yrs. old was invaluable. She saw that there is a whole country speaking Hungarian and not just in isolated groups and pockets here

in America. She felt totally at home and comfortable understanding everyone on the bus, in the restaurants, and especially playing with children on the playground.

Our heartfelt thanks go to our parents, family, church, scouting leaders, Hungarian School teachers, and anyone else who contributed to our bilingual, bicultural upbringing!

Being a teacher of 4th graders in the local Cleveland Hungarian Language School, I asked my class the following question:

Do you like being bilingual? Why or why not? 9 - 11 year old Hungarian language school students' opinions:

- I like it because I can go to many countries and talk without using a dictionary.
- I want to be Bilingual (BL) so I can learn about the History and tell you about it in that language.
- If I ever move to Hungary, I'll know its history and I'll be able to talk with everyone.
- I have a wider variety of people I can communicate with.
- I can travel the worlds and explore.
- It's cool because my friends and I can talk in private and people don't understand us.
- I don't want to BL – I want to be normal.
- Sometimes I don't want to be, because I want to see what it's like to speak English all the time, with all my relatives and everyone.
- I could read books that have not been translated and discover a new world of imagination.
- Being BL helps me learn other languages as well in the future.
- I can learn about my culture and history and can communicate with a lot of people.
- You can explain, teach and show off your culture to others.

In conclusion, the advantages and the perceived disadvantages of bilingualism will be covered.

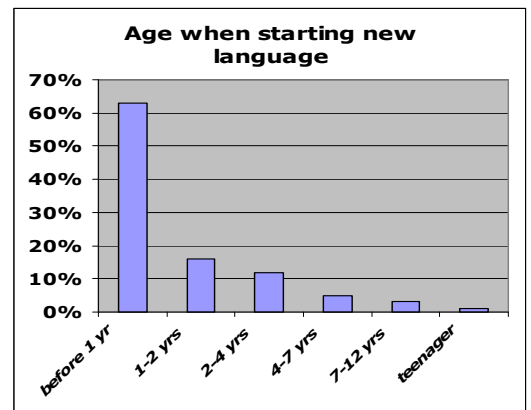
7. Advantages and Disadvantages

There are so many benefits to knowing more than one language that your multilingual child will no doubt be grateful to you forever. With many old myths it is sometimes difficult to make head or tail of it. So let's explore the *real* pros and cons.

The Advantages

Growing up with multiple languages is the easiest, fastest, and most effortless way to learn a foreign language. For your baby, it will be as natural as learning one language is to all babies.

- **It is easier to learn another language from birth** than it is during any other time in life -- baby simply has two first languages. **(See chart)**
- **Your child will have a head start in school.** In most countries, a foreign language is mandatory.
- **If your child wants to study more languages later in life, she will have an advantage.** The differences in sounds, word order, stress, rhythm, intonation and grammatical structures will be easier to learn. For related languages, such as Spanish and French, the similar vocabulary will make learning especially fast.
- **Multilingualism has been proven to help your child develop superior reading and writing skills.**
- **Multilingual children also tend to have over all better analytical, social, and academic skills than their monolingual peers.**



- **Knowing more than one language helps your child feel at ease in different environments.** It creates a natural flexibility and adaptability, and it increases her self-esteem and self-confidence.
- **Your child will develop an appreciation for other cultures** and an innate acceptance of cultural differences.
- **Career prospects are multiplied many times over for people who know more than one language.** Helen Riley-Collins, president of Aunt Ann's In-House Staffing in San Francisco, said more than half her clients request nannies who speak another language. "Families who are involved in international business are thinking ahead," she said of her clients, many of whom work in high tech, investment banking or finance. "They want to give their children a head start in business in 20 years."
- **You probably will feel emotionally closer to your baby when speaking your native language to her,** if your native language is different from the community language,

The Perceived Disadvantages

Raising a multilingual child is something that is full of misconceptions. Everyone has an opinion and may be more than happy to share it with you. But, extensive medical studies on language development in the last 10-20 years have proven most of these myths wrong.

To make an informed decision, you need to know the facts. The truth is that there are basically only **four potential disadvantages**, and even these are not true in every case:

Additional effort for the parents. This is probably the biggest issue. Raising a multilingual child is a commitment and much like piano lessons -- you can't expect your little one to be a virtuoso overnight. This is a long-term investment in your child. It will require extra effort on your part to provide enough language exposure, extra encouragement, keeping your language rules consistent, and in some cases even change the previous language pattern in the family. It can feel a bit awkward at first if you introduce a new language into the family when baby is born, but rest assured, after a few weeks it simply becomes a part of your daily routine. Incidentally, it's easier to raise a multilingual second child if your first child was raised that way. Your first will end up doing a lot of the work for you by simply being a natural chatterbox. Parents of multilingual children agree overwhelmingly that the benefits for their children are well worth the effort.

Having to teach reading and writing. Yes, teaching a multilingual child to read and write adds to the academic load, however it is necessary if the aim is full literacy in all of your chosen languages. For some parents, it's enough if the child can *speak* in a particular language. Others want to go the extra mile and add reading and writing abilities. Of course, it's easier if the alphabet is the same, but even related alphabets such as the Roman, Russian, and Greek systems are similar enough that your child will pick them up fairly easily. Pictographs systems like Chinese, however, require a much more concentrated effort.

Speaking Later. While there's no scientific evidence that proves multilinguals begin speaking later, many parents estimate that there is a three to six month delay compared to monolingual children the same age. If you think about it, it makes sense that a child learning two or more language systems might take more time, since they are actually learning twice as many words. Even so, six months is a small price to pay for the ability to speak two or three languages!

Mixing languages. Mixing words is very common in children learning more than one language at a time. But this is a temporary phenomenon (my daughter Julia and her friend, Caitlin). At the age of four or five it has mostly disappeared. Don't forget that children who are learning only one language often use the wrong word until they learn the right one and adults often say "umm" when the right word doesn't come quickly. When multilingual kids can't think of a word in Vietnamese, for example, they might borrow it from French. This automatically disappears when the vocabulary in each language increases. The best remedy is to be consistent when talking to your child. Your patience will be rewarded, guaranteed.

There's no doubt that multilingual, multicultural children have more advantages. Your extra effort will give them a valuable skill they'll use in numerous ways for the rest of their lives.

8. Conclusions

- Language optimizes the understanding of culture and the bridging between generations
- Motivation, commitment & consistency is key
- Foundation during early years critical
- High degree and range of "exposure" to language, culture as well as social and family support is important
- Benefits far outweigh the effort
- Invest in your children and don't "break the chain" if possible

People everywhere have strong ideas about children growing up with a second or third language. These ideas influence how people interact with their children and how they look at other people's children. These ideas also influence how professionals such as teachers, doctors, and speech therapists advise parents of children growing up bilingually. Sadly, many ideas that people have about children growing up with a second or third language in childhood are not of any benefit to these children and may in fact have adverse effects. Fortunately, we have only had positive reactions from our pediatrician and teachers. Hopefully, I was able to dispel some myths about children growing up bilingually and offer suggestions that can help children to become fluent users of two or more languages as so many of us were and our children are.

Only when the child grows into an adult, who is fully functional in the family language, might he or she be able to teach it to his/her own children.

Your informed decision is critical for finding the right balance!

9. Questions & Answers

SOURCES USED:

<http://www.multilingualchildren.org/index.html> (Extensive information on all aspects of bilingualism including communication with parents raising children bilingually)

<http://www.geocities.com/bilingualfamilies/bilingualism.html>

Romaine, S., (1995). *Bilingualism* (2nd ed). London: Blackwell.

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/HL.htm>

<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/earlychild.html>

<http://www.nethelp.no/cindy/myth.html>

<http://www.asha.org/public/>

<http://www.cfc-efc.ca/docs/cccf/00000128.htm> (*Child and Family Canada – a useful site for all types of information pertaining to families.*)

<http://www.ethnologue.org/home.asp> (*Lists the almost 7,000 known languages of the world, maps(how many speak what lang. in certain countries, info...)*)

<http://www.linguistlist.org/ask-ling/biling2.html> (*FAQ's answered by a linguist from Eastern Michigan Univ. or Wayne State Univ. Also has a place to contact a linguist.*)

<http://www.brad.ac.uk/staff/pkkornakov/bilHermeneus2000.htm>

<http://www.eduposters.com/about.htm>

Additional books

The Language Instinct *By Steven Pinker*

Highly entertaining and provocatively written. Author is an MIT professor specializing in the language development of children. Book discusses the subject of multilingualism when unraveling how babies learn to talk and how people make sense of speech. Book is well argued, humorous, and truly captivating.

What's Going on in There? *By Lise Eliot*

A great read for any parent, multilingual or not. With impressive depth and clarity, Eliot, a neuroscientist and mother of three, offers a comprehensive overview of current scientific knowledge about infant and early childhood brain development. Explains the inner workings of the brain and includes valuable insights into language development. Book also covers the evolution of the senses, motor skills, social and emotional growth, memory, and intelligence.

A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism *By Colin Baker*

An introduction for parents raising or considering raising multilingual children. Organized in a Q/A format with simple language. Some readers find it somewhat repetitive, while others enjoy the straight forward and common sense style.

Growing Up With Two Languages *By Cunningham-Ande*

Informatively written. Covers mixed language families and intercultural marriage; including language development, advantages and disadvantages of two languages, parenting in a bilingual home, problems and motivation. Full of case studies and parent opinions.

How Language Comes to Children *By Benedicte De Boysson-Bardies, Malcolm Debevoise*

A very delightful and accessible book written on language development. From fetal development to the toddler years, it examines a wide range of puzzling questions: recognizing elements of speech; organizing and analyzing them; understanding and reproducing sounds and how the ability to communicate through language emerges in children?

The Bilingual Family: A Handbook for Parents *By Edith Harding-Esch, Philip Riley*

Easy to read, easy to understand, and a good survey of the main issues, while raising some of the deeper issues of language acquisition. Many enjoy this book with lots of real-life examples, while other readers object to a slightly dry writing style.

Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism *By Colin Baker*

A resource volume primarily for teachers with bilingual children in their classrooms, or teachers of foreign language to young children. Parents interested in the schooling their children receive may also find it useful.

Raising Multilingual Children *By Tracey Tokuhamma-Espinosa*

Book covers the various factors in raising multilingual children, descriptions of real-life families, and the underlying physiology. It's a well-written autobiography of a highly educated family who has become multilingual as a part of their diplomatic lifestyle. Despite being a popular book, many readers question the author explanation of critical period. Others find the presumed connection between right/left handedness and language dubious.

Bilingualism in Development *By Ellen Bialystok*

For the more academically oriented reader. Book describes research on the intellectual development of bilingual children, showing how it is different from that of monolingual children. Focus is on preschool children, examining how they learn language and acquire literacy skills.

One Child, Two Languages *By Patton O. Tabors*

Early childhood educators of linguistically diverse preschoolers will find this a practical resource. What does a young child, whose home language is not English, go through when he/she first goes to a English-speaking preschool? A child at this young age does not have enough social skills to compensate for his initial lack of competence in a different language.

Resources on Bilingualism and Bilingual Acquisition

Baetens Beardsmore, H. (1986). *Bilingualism: Basic principles*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

De Houwer, A. (1995). Bilingual language acquisition. In P. Fletcher & B. MacWhinney (Eds.), *Handbook of child language*. London: Blackwell.

De Houwer, A. (Ed.). (1998). Bilingual acquisition [special issue]. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 2(3).

Hakuta, K. (1986). *Mirror of language. The debate on bilingualism*. New York: Basic Books.

Resources for Bilingual Families

Arnberg, L. (1987). *Raising children bilingually: The pre-school years*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Bilingual Family Newsletter (BFN), Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Harding, E., & Riley, P. (1987). *The bilingual family. A handbook for parents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saunders, G. (1982). *Bilingual children: Guidance for the family*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Saunders, G. (1988). *Bilingual children: From birth to teens*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.