Language Acquisition for the Bilingual Child

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Parent-Infant Educators  
North Carolina Early Intervention Program for Children  
Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Learner outcomes

- Participants will understand the concerns of parents and professionals regarding second language acquisition.
- Participants will understand the different approaches used to facilitate bilingualism.
- Participants will explore whether and how bilingualism is possible for children with hearing loss.
Why is this an important topic?

- Influx of immigrants presenting new challenges
- Immigrant families ….Need to learn English? How do we retain our native culture and language?
- Research shows that children can learn more than one language without negatively impacting their education.
- Current literature stresses the importance of providing services in the home language when working with children with special needs (Hardin et al., 2009), as well as children without disabilities.
"In its simplest form, bilingualism is defined as 'knowing' two languages"

(Valdez & Figueora, 1994 as cited in Gottardo & Grant, 2012).
Why does the US remain a monolingual society?

- Negative attitudes toward diversity
- Inability of programs and providers to deliver services in the native language of the immigrant families due to financial constraints or lack of bilingual personnel
- High status of English in the USA
- The political climate toward immigrants impacting a family’s decision to hold onto the mother tongue or to select English as the only language for their child
- Lack of opportunities for the American monolingual parent to provide foreign language exposure for their children
Bilingualism Myths

1) Bilingualism diminishes the ability to learn English

2) Bilingualism contributes to language delays (King & Fogle, 2006; Lowry, 2011).

3) Bilingualism leads to language confusion (King & Fogle, 2006; Lowry, 2011).

4) Children are wired to be monolingual
1) Diminished Ability to Learn English

There are still those who think that learning a second language interferes with mastering the primary language and can lead to language impairment especially for children with cochlear implants. Nevertheless, the fact remains that current "Research suggests that children who learn a second language are more creative and better at solving complex problems than those who do not...”

(Cal Center for Applied Linguistics, n.d)
2) Bilingualism and Language Delay

- “No empirical evidence links bilingualism to language delay of any sort”. (King and Fogle, 2006)

- It is not uncommon for “preschool bilingual children to know fewer words in each language than monolingual children, when each language is examined separately” (Genesee, 2012, Pearson, 1993; Pearson, Fernandez, Lewedeg, & Oller, 1997; Hoff & Elledge; 2003 as cited in Hoff & McKay, 2005).

- Bilingual children’s smaller vocabulary in each language is related to the learning environment. “Many bilingual children do not have totally equivalent vocabularies in both languages because they often learn each language from different people and/ or in different settings” (Genesee, 2007).

- Researchers suggest that this ‘delay’ is a kind of flexibility that allows bilingual children to be open to the great diversity of words to which they are exposed in both languages.

- If we count the total number of words a child has in both languages, bilingual children have vocabularies that are the same size or larger than those of monolingual children (Pearson, Fernández, & Oller, 1993 as cited in Hoff & MacKay, 2005), & (Genesee, 2012).

- The research is clear, “language development can be typical or atypical regardless of the number of languages in a child’s repertoire. Speech-language and developmental clinical conditions affect multilinguals and monolinguals alike, which means that there is no correlation between multilingualism, or monolingualism, and disorder.” (Cruz Ferrira, 2011).
What is a Bilingual Vocabulary Count / Score?

A bilingual score is the total number of labeled concepts in two languages without counting duplicate words for a particular concept.
Using a single language score excludes a significant portion of bilingual children’s productive vocabulary, thus underestimating lexical knowledge (Pearson et al., 1993).
Fereshteh Kunkel (2009) suggested using MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories for the purpose of obtaining a bilingual score.

Administer the Spanish and English versions of the MacArthur-Bates. Score them normally to obtain scores in each language.

For the bilingual score, be sure to only count one word for each labeled concept regardless of whether the child has a label for that concept in both languages. *Example: Zapato + shoe = 1 concept*

The bilingual score, therefore, represents the number of concepts expressed regardless of language.
MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development
Inventory II: Words and Sentences

161
• SPANISH words produced
• 23rd percentile (Spanish version)

128
• ENGLISH words produced
• 11th percentile (English version)

219
• BILINGUAL Vocabulary Count
• 35th percentile (Spanish version)
• 22nd percentile (English version)
3) Bilingualism & Language Confusion

- The fear that Bilingualism leads to language confusion comes from “code switching” or “borrowing”:
  
  Code Switching: the alternate use of two or more languages, within the same discourse.
  
  Borrowing: “the incorporation of lexical elements from one language in the lexicon of another language” (Muysken, 1995 as cited in Dulm, 2007).

- “Research on child bilingual code-mixing indicates that it is not a sign of confusion” (Genesee, 2003 as cited in Genesee 2012).

- Children who code switch are not confused “because they are able to use their two languages appropriately with different people” (Genesee, 2012).
Bilingualism Myths

- the ability to switch back and forth between languages, …. is a sign of mastery of two linguistic systems, not a sign of language confusion, and that children as young as 2 are able to code-switch in socially appropriate ways” (Lanza, 1992 as cited by King and Fogle, 2006)

- previous views that bilingual babies exhibited language delays and confusion because they possess a single, fused representation of their two languages has been challenged by new findings that propose “that very young bilingual infants have distinct representations of their two input languages from their first steps into the language acquisition process” (Petitto 2002 as cited by Petitto, 2001)
4) Children are wired to be monolingual

There is no evidence that human beings are programmed to be monolinguals. “Recent brain scanning studies of adult bilingual brains have demonstrated that the neural pathways for bilingual’s two languages are the same (and similar to monolinguals) but only if they had early bilingual language exposure”

(Klein, Milner, Zatorre, Evans & Meyer, 1995 as cited by Petitto & Kovelman, 2003)
The Christian Science Monitor (2011), reported that the United States has been called “the graveyard of languages” for pushing English and excluding other tongues.

What can a parent do?

1. Formulate and stick with a “Language Plan”
2. Insist that the child respond in the same language
3. Provide opportunities for use of the first language with others
Bilingual Acquisition
Simultaneous acquisition (dual language exposure)
A child under the age of three who is exposed to two languages usually experiences simultaneous acquisition.

Successive acquisition
If a child is exposed to the second language at an older age (over age three), successive acquisition usually occurs“(National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, 1995).
Simultaneous Acquisition vs. Successive Acquisition

“..early dual language exposure is most optimal to achieve highly proficient and equal dual language mastery “ as well as to achieve “successful reading acquisition “. (Petitto, 2009).

Researcher have “consistently found that proficiency in the later-exposed bilingual and/or second language learners declined dramatically if learned after puberty, if not earlier (Johnson & Newport, 1989; McDonald 2000 as cited in Pettito & Dunbar, 2004 ).

But, “while early dual language exposure is most optimal ... children arriving late to a bilingual context can and do achieve language competence in their new language”. (Pettito & Dunbar, 2004).
True balanced bilingualism, also called equilingualism, occurs when individuals are equally fluent in two languages. The fact is that there are different levels of bilingualism and that “native-like proficiency in both languages, referred to as ‘true’ bilingualism, is rare” (Cutler, Mehler, Norris, & Segui as cited by Gottardo & Grant, 2008).

It is also accurate to say that most multilingual people have a dominant language.
Two Approaches to Facilitate Bilingualism

- One parent speaks to the child in one language and the other parent speaks to the child in the other language. “This approach can be a good compromise for families who want their children to maintain their heritage language but at the same time don’t want them to arrive at school not knowing English” (Hinton, 1999).

- Using the mother tongue at home and the language of the environment / society outside of the home.
  For example: at school, church or when they are playing with neighborhood kids. (it is advisable that therapy services provided in the home be in the native tongue - use an interpreter if necessary)
Successfully Raising a Bilingual Child

What it takes…

1) At least one parent speaks only their mother-tongue to the child.

2) The child has some reason to learn the languages (motivation).

3) There is reinforcement of some kind for the native languages, preferably outside the home. (festivals, church, peers)

4) Consistent and meaningful language input.

Based on work by Deborah D.K. Ruuskanen from The Linguistics List- Eastern Michigan University
What it takes… (continued)

5) Emphasize the separation of languages.

6) Once the family has chosen a family language strategy, consistency is key.

7) Create and implement a language plan. According to Rosenberg (1996), success in raising a bilingual child “appears to depend on whether a ‘language plan’ has been worked out in advance.”

8) Immersion in both languages and constant input are critical.

9) Keep in mind… just like in first language acquisition, there is a critical period for second language acquisition.
What is a Language plan?

- A language plan can be as simple as selecting a strategy and creating a plan.
- Writing it down helps parents as well as providers involved with the child.
Goal: Bilingualism

Strategy/plan:

- Both parent speaks language A
- Therapy sessions in the home use language A
- Home media in language A
- School – language B
- Additional ways to strengthen language A input: Involvement within the cultural community (festivals, church, parades, etc.) Incidental learning in the outside environment (movies, library, supermarket etc.) in language B
Approach for Multilingualism

One parent speaks his/her native language to the child (e.g. Spanish) and the other parent speaks his/her native language to the child (e.g. Mandarin). The child obtains the country’s language from the outside environment (e.g. school).
Hearing children exposed to two languages since early childhood, be it two spoken languages or a signed language and a spoken language, achieve their language milestone on the same maturational timetable. (Petitto et al., 2001, *Journal of Child Language*).

“Being exposed to two languages from birth-and, in particular being exposed to a signed and spoken language from birth does not cause a child to be language delayed and confused” (Petitto, L. A., & Kovelman, I. , 2003).

Yoshinaga-Itano (in press) as cited by Madden (2008), found that the three profoundly deaf children in his study who wore amplification (with no speech perception of discrimination but some awareness of sound and some ability to produce vocalizations before implantation), had auditory and speech instruction as well as sign language instruction and had a substantial sign vocabulary prior to CI implantation, appeared to fast map their speech production to their sign vocabulary after CI implantation. These children developed age appropriate or near age appropriate spoken vocabulary within 12 to 14 months post implant. Yoshinaga-Itano believes that this development appears to be evidence of an oral phonology piggy-back onto the lexical sign language foundation.

(remember- early exposure and simultaneous presentation are the key)
According to Petitto et al (2000), “the human brain can entertain multiple pathways for language expression and reception, and the cerebral specialization for language functions is not exclusive to the mechanisms for producing and perceiving speech and sound.”

“Infants are born with a propensity to acquire language. Whether the language comes as speech or sign language, it does not appear to matter to the brain” (Petitto, n.d).
The historical consequences of hearing loss, that have included the inability to interpret speech sounds thus affecting communication ability, are changing due to new technologies, newborn hearing screening, and early intervention efforts.
Cochlear Implants and Bilingualism

- “The results of the four studies reviewed indicate that children with cochlear implants raised in bilingual oral environments can indeed learn more than one language. (Cote and Gilliat, n.d)

- “Children implanted at younger ages tended to demonstrate better skills more quickly, and tended to reach levels similar to children with normal hearing at much faster rates.” … “A cochlear implant can make oral proficiency in more than one language possible for prelingually deaf children.” (Zwolan & Thomas, 2011)

- “New technology makes learning tonal languages a possibility for children with CIs.” They also stressed the importance of following “the principles of the Auditory-Verbal Approach, for bilingualism to succeed when working with children with cochlear implants.” (Zwolan & Thomas, 2011)
“..children, including deaf children, can become multilingual” (Gerner de García, 1993 as cited in Call, 2006)

Call (2006) reported “that three languages will not confuse a deaf or hard-of-hearing child” (Gerner de García 1993b, 1995a as cited in Call, 2006) and that as long as “self identity is not a dilemma, being trilingual can boost a child’s self esteem”.
Bilingualism and Hearing Loss

Preliminary conclusions from a study by Douglas and Zarate (2008) found:

- “With good speech perception and intervention and immersion in both languages children tended to make monthly gains relatively equal in both languages...”

- “The children demonstrated the same bilingual phenomenon as reported in normal hearing developing bilinguals”

- “Bilingualism is a team effort and no less difficult than helping a hearing impaired child to acquire one language”
THANK YOU!


Child Raising Bilingual Children: Common Parental Concerns and Current Research.mht


King, K. & Fogle, L.(2006). Raising Bilingual Children: Common Parental Concerns and Current Research Center for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved March 18, 2012 from C:\Users\lucyq\Documents\classes\language acquisition\research paper\bilingual


