


# Child Language Development in Bilingual and Multilingual Environments



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# Overview

- Bilingualism in Canada
- Types of bilingualism
- Review of communication milestones in monolingual preschoolers
- Communication development in bilingual children
- First language loss
- Bilingualism and language delay/disorder
- Practical considerations for your practice



# Bilingualism in Canada

- Demographic weight of Anglophones & Francophones
  - 18,056,000 Canadians have English as their mother tongue (57.8%)
  - 6,892,000 Canadians have French as their mother tongue (22.1%)
- Allophone immigrant population
  - 20% of Canadians are allophone (up from 13% in 1986)

Source: Canada Census 2006



# Bilingualism in Canada

- Bilingualism (Eng/Fr) in Canada is on the rise
  - 1961- 12.2%
  - 1981- 15.3%
  - 2001- 17.7%
- At age 21, 29% of youth surveyed reported that they were able to carry on a conversation in both English and French

Source: Canada Census 2006



# Bilingualism in Canada

- 77% of Canadians recognize the importance of preserving both English and French
- 90% of Canadians agree that individuals who speak more than one language are more likely to be successful in a global economy
- 74% of Anglophones and 93% of Francophones believe that their children should learn the other official language

Source: CRIC, "Bilingualism: Part of Our Past or Part of Our Future?"



# Types of Bilingualism

## ■ Simultaneous

- Learning two languages at the same time before age 1 (up to age 3)

## ■ Sequential

- Learning a 2nd language after age 3



# Types of Bilingualism

- 4 types of bilingual language learners
  - Simultaneous learner from majority language group
  - Simultaneous learner from minority language group
  - Sequential learner from majority language group
  - Sequential learner from minority language group



# Variables Affecting Learning

- Quantity of language input
- Quality of language input
- Variety of contexts of language exposure and opportunities for language use
- Environment
- Attitude and motivation of child



# Review of Normal Language Development

<b>Age</b>	<b>12 months</b>	<b>18 months</b>	<b>2 years</b>	<b>3 years</b>	<b>4 years</b>
<b>Words Used</b>	*3-5 words	*20 words	*100-150 words	500-2000 words	2000 + words
<b>Length of Message</b>	1 word	1-2 words	*2-4 words	*5-8 words	*Tells stories *adult type grammar
<b>Clarity of Speech</b>	40%		60%	80%	100%

\* Source: Ontario Preschool Speech & Language Milestones



# Receptive Language

- Understanding, comprehension of
  - Words
  - Concepts
  - Questions
  - Directions
  - Stories



# Expressive Language

## Non-Verbally



## Verbally

- Eye Contact
- Reaching/Pulling
- Pointing
- Gestures

- Vowels
- Consonants
- Babbling
- Words
- Word combinations
- Sentences
- Stories

# Typical Pattern of Speech Sound Development:



p, b, m,  
w, h

-----  
t, d, n

Early sounds: before 3 years

k, g, y, ng,

-----  
f, s, z

Appear between 3- 3 ½ years

sh j, ch, l

Appear after 4 years

r, th, v

Appear after 5 years





# Thoughts on Simultaneous Bilingualism

- In the 1940s, 50s & 60s
  - Bilingual children face important obstacles
  - Babies and children can only learn 1 language at a time
  - “Limited Capacity Hypothesis”



# Thoughts on Simultaneous Bilingualism

- It is **now** believed that babies & young children have the innate ability to learn more than 1 language
  - Show preference for mother's voice
  - Distinguish between L1 and other languages
  - Ability to discriminate between sounds of all languages at 6 months of age
  - Ability to distinguish between words of different languages around 7.5 months of age
  - Ability to use language specific grammatical rules at 2 years of age



# Communication Development in Simultaneous Learners

- A simultaneous dual language learner has 2 separate language systems (“Dual Language Systems Model”)
- 2 language systems interact together, the child is not 2 monolinguals
  - Acceleration
  - Deceleration
  - Transfer



# Communication Development in Simultaneous Learners

- Early communicative milestones are attained at comparable ages
  - Babbling
  - First words
  - First 50 words
  - Word combinations
- In general, grammar and phonology evolve in a similar fashion
  - Errors are normal (transfer)



# Communication Development in Simultaneous Learners

- Determine child's dominant language
  - Longer sentence length and more advanced grammatical structures
  - Larger vocabulary
  - Fewer pauses or hesitations
  - Greater volubility



# Communication Development in Sequential Learners

- Children tend to go through 4 stages
  - Use of the first language (L1) in the second language (L2) environment
  - Non verbal period
  - Telegraphic phase
  - Productive use of L2 (interlanguage)



# Communication Development in Sequential Learners

- Two types of L2 proficiency
  - Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) can take 1-3 years.
    - Language needed to interact socially
  - Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) can take 5-7 years.
    - Language needed to learn in school



# First Language Loss

- Bilingual children whose L1 is a minority language are at risk
- Consequences of L1 loss
  - Eroding family relationships
  - Poor self image
  - Loss of cultural identity
  - Compromised school relationships
  - Compromised school performance



# First Language Loss

## ■ Contributing factors

- Age of introduction of L2
- Rank in family
- Interaction with L1 peers
- Language profile of parents
- Environmental perceptions of the importance/value of L1



# Learning 3 languages

- Limited research available especially on simultaneous trilingualism
- There is no evidence to suggest that a young child cannot learn more than 2 languages but...
  - Sufficient exposure to all 3 languages is necessary to develop proficiency



# Code-Mixing

- Use of elements from 2 language within the same sentence or conversation
  - Inter-utterance (e.g. Come to the table. *Le souper est pret*)
  - Intra-utterance(e.g. I'm driving to the movie *avec elle*)
- Seen in both bilingual adults and children
- Has several functions



# Bilingualism & Language Disorder

- Simultaneous bilingualism:
  - Learning 2 languages at a young age will NOT cause a language delay/disorder
  - If a true delay exists, it will be present in both languages
  - Types of errors and severity noted will be similar to monolingual peers with language disorder



# Bilingualism & Language Disorder

- Sequential Bilingualism
  - It takes time to learn L2!
  - If a disorder is truly present, it will be observed in L1
  - Immersion schooling debate



# Practical Considerations

- Babies and children have the ability to learn more than 1 language at a very young age
  - It should not be assumed that a language delay is caused by exposure to 2 languages
  - Parents should be encouraged to ensure sufficient exposure in both languages
  - Referral to speech-language pathologist should be encouraged if a simultaneous bilingual child is not hitting major communication milestones on time



# Practical Considerations

- Children with language disorder can become bilingual
  - Parents should be reassured that dual language exposure did not cause or make the delay more severe
  - It is not appropriate to recommend to the parents of a bilingual child with a language disorder to limit exposure to only 1 language



# Practical Considerations

- Sequential bilingual children using a minority language are at-risk for L1 loss which can have negative consequences
  - Parents should be encouraged to continue speaking L1 in the home
  - Parents should be encouraged to increase peer interaction with other children speaking L1
  - Parents should be encouraged to read books in L1
  - Bilingualism should be viewed positively and reinforced



# Practical Considerations

- Learning L2 sequentially takes time
  - A silent period lasting from a few weeks to a few months (after intro of L2) is normal and not cause for concern
  - Many variables will affect how quickly a child will learn L2. Parents should be reassured that individual variation is normal
  - If there are concerns regarding possible language delay, inquire about proficiency in L1



# Practical Considerations

- Code-Mixing (CM) is a normal part of bilingual communication.
  - It should not be assumed that a child who is CM has a language delay/disorder
  - Bilingual children and parents should not be reprimanded from CM
  - CM can reflect a child's cultural/social identity



# Practical Considerations

- Strategies to use to help children learn L2
  - Use shorter and grammatically simple sentences
  - Make important words stand out
  - Slow down when speaking
  - Use simple, everyday vocabulary
  - Use gestures
  - Talk about the here and now
  - Repeat, repeat, repeat



# Referring to a Speech-Language Pathologist

## ■ Who?

- Simultaneous learner showing delays in both languages
- Sequential learner who has an observed or reported delay in L1
  - Use pamphlets available on Ontario ministry website with parents (translated in many languages: <http://www.gov.on.ca/children/english/resources/beststart/index.html>)
- Sequential learner who remains in the silent phase for more than 7 months
- Any child with speech and language concerns



# Referring to a Speech-Language Pathologist

## ■ When?

- It is NEVER too early to refer, avoid “wait & see”
- Research shows that therapy is most effective before 30 months of age

## ■ Where?

- Local Preschool Language Initiative (PSL) for children under 5 years of age (or eligibility for SK)
- School Board for children enrolled in SK



# Primary Language & Literacy Program

## ■ Goals

- Increase awareness about the importance of using L1 at home
- Increase knowledge of typical speech and language development
- Provide strategies to promote communication development in everyday activities



# Primary Language & Literacy Program

## ■ Information provided

- Developing early language
- Developing language through reading and story telling
- Developing language through play and music
- Developing language through television and videos
- Preparing children to learn at school
- Kindergarten expectations



# Case Discussion

- Hamda is a 4 years old and lives in Ottawa with her parents, both of whom speak Somali and very limited English. Hamda's parents immigrated to Canada 5 years ago and have little family or friends who speak Somali. Hamda was born in Canada but has grown up speaking only Somali. Her first contact with English was when she started attending an English Head Start daycare 9 months ago. She is enrolled to begin JK in a few months. Hamda's ECEs are concerned that she is learning English very slowly and her parents have decided to speak English to her at home to help prepare her for school. Parents have also mentioned that she was slow to start talking in Somali as well.



# Case Discussion

## ■ Questions

- What kind of bilingualism is shown in Hamda's case?
- What challenges does Hamda face?
- What recommendations would you give to Hamda's ECEs and parents?

# Question Period

