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Language acquisition and bilingualism in the family: A case study

Abstract. This article will examine some of the variables involved in simultaneous child bilingualism. Among variables considered are the native languages spoken by the parents (the same or different languages), the country of residence (and if it corresponds to one of the parents' languages or neither), the prestige attached to either of the languages, the majority or minority status in context, and attitudes shown by the protagonists of each family story and those surrounding them. More than half the world's population uses two or more languages in everyday life, which implies that bilingualism is by no means a rare phenomenon (Van Wechem & Halbach: 2014). Yet people surrounding the families of children involved in a bilingual situation often voice concerns over the children's future linguistic competence, worrying that they will speak neither language adequately. However, studies have shown that they are neither delayed in their linguistic development nor disadvantaged by their bilingualism, and in fact their ability to manage more than one language can become an important asset in life. Data from a case concerning three brothers will be presented, showing that their language acquisition broadly followed the same stages as in monolinguals, and that there was no cause for concern over delayed cognitive skills.

Keywords: bilingual children, variables in multilingual acquisition, multilingual practices in families.

1. INTRODUCTION

More than half the world's population uses two or more languages in everyday life, which implies that bilingualism is by no means a rare phenomenon (Van Wechem & Halbach: 2014). Similarly, Crystal (1986: 211) maintains that "The world is full of children who grow up bilingual without a linguistic care in the world". However, relatives and people surrounding the families of children involved in a bilingual situation often voice concerns over the children's possible linguistic competence, fearing that they will speak neither language adequately. In researching harmonious bilingual development, De Houwer

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(2015: 169) observes that when children raised with two languages appear to be slow in developing language, relatives, speech therapists and educators are quick to blame the bilingual element. She adds that at school bilinguals may be ridiculed when they are heard speaking their "other" language, and that bilingualism is often blamed for bad behaviour in unruly children. None of this criticism is received, however, by monolingual families whose children may also experience slow language acquisition or unruly behaviour.

Numerous studies have shown that children raised as bilinguals are neither delayed in their linguistic development nor disadvantaged by their bilingualism. In a detailed review of research on early childhood bilingualism, Genesee (2015: 7) concludes that children acquiring two languages from birth achieve the same basic milestones in language development as monolinguals, and that "learning two languages simultaneously is no more challenging for the human neurocognitive system than learning one" (Genesee 2015: 8). For her part, Susanne Döpke (2004) deals with language development in bilingual children, the milestones of linguistic development, and questions whether bilinguals might experience difficulties. She maintains that, based on evidence she has examined, "bilingualism DOES NOT CAUSE [capital letters in the original] any difficulties with language development" and that "bilingual children do not have such problems any more frequently than do monolingual children" (Döpke 2004: 5). It is interesting to note that in addition to being a linguist, Döpke is a speech pathologist, and has raised two bilingual children.

Fantini (1985) presented a detailed study of his son's bilingual upbringing from a sociolinguistic perspective, examining the social factors which influenced the child's language choice and differentiation awareness. He concluded that the child demonstrated, through proficiency tests at different times, that he was at a similar developmental level to that of monolingual children of his age, and that there was no evidence of impairment or disadvantage due to early exposure to two languages.

Such studies by linguists are generally confirmed by lay families' experiences. No two family situations are completely alike, and therefore it would be unwise to try to establish rules about how to manage the bilingual acquisition process. Among possible variables are the native languages spoken by the parents (the same or different languages), the country of residence (and if it corresponds to one of the parents' languages, both, or neither), the prestige attached to either of the languages, the majority or minority status of the pair of languages in context, and not least important, attitudes shown by the protagonists of each family story and those surrounding them.

2. BASIC ISSUES FOR BILINGUAL FAMILIES

When life provides the opportunity to raise bilingual children, parents should be aware that the process requires a great deal of thought and effort on their part (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 81). Firstly, parents might vary considerably in how they view their own language (and that of their partner if different from their own), and their attitudes will determine how committed they will become to the idea of a bilingual home, and ultimately how successful the experience will be. By successful, we mean the achievement of a satisfactory mastery of the two languages from the child's point of view, with her / him being able to communicate and be understood in both languages, and knowing which one is most appropriate in a given context. Differentiating between languages is a skill also needed in diglossic communities where one language or dialect has precedence over another and is considered to be socially more acceptable or is officially required for certain communicative purposes. The same kind of differentiating skill is also needed in monolingual communities in which register is important as a marker of respect and politeness. Knowing what to say and to whom is part of a life-long learning process for all speakers, and bilingual children are no exception, using this skill to make their language choices.

As Harding-Esch and Riley (2003: 82) point out, one of the most frequent and understandable reasons for parents wishing to bring up their children as bilinguals is so that they are able to talk to their grandparents and other relatives. Otherwise, family visits with a lack of communication cause emotional hardship especially to grandparents, who, in addition, may not see the children often enough to maintain linguistic contact.

However, it is useful to ask exactly what is meant by being bilingual. Verhagen et al. (2022: 1109) maintain that "not all children who are exposed to two languages from a young age onward become active users of these languages themselves, and those who grow up bilingual show wide variation in the proficiency levels they achieve". Indeed, some children may be passive bilinguals in practice, while others achieve widely differing degrees of bilingualism. What degree of mastery constitutes bilingual status? Among the many definitions of bilingualism offered over time, the following could be considered to shed some light on the question (all cited in Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 23):

1. "Bilingualism [is] native-like control of two languages… Of course, one cannot define a degree of perfection at which a good foreign speaker becomes a bilingual: the distinction is relative" (Bloomfield 1933).
2. "Bilingualism is understood… to begin at the point where the speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language" (Haugen 1953).

3. "The phenomenon of bilingualism [is] something entirely relative… We shall therefore consider bilingualism as the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual" (Mackey 1962).
4. "The bilingual is NOT the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals; rather, he or she has a unique and specific linguistic configuration" (Grosjean 1992).

It can be seen how definitions such as the above have changed over time. In (1), bilingual mastery is said to be relative and difficult to define. The author of (2) situates the bilingual threshold at the point in which meaningful utterances are produced in both languages, but this would include anyone who studies enough of a foreign language at school or college to pass exams, and seems to be an exaggeration of foreign language proficiency. The term 'relative' appears again in (3) and the author refers to an individual's alternating use of the languages. Perhaps the most useful definition is found in (4): bilinguals are individual cases, with unique circumstances and outcomes, and therefore it is arbitrary to state when a person can be considered bilingual and to what degree. This brings us back to the family and the particular situation experienced at home. This article will therefore examine some of the factors influencing linguistic development in two languages in the family context.

Several authors write to dispel some of the myths of bilingualism (Genesee 2015; Grosjean 2010; Lowry 2015). For example, Borges and Lyddy (2023) maintain that bilingualism is often associated with misconceptions which have implications for education, policy-making, and for parental decisions. One of the misconceptions they highlight is that acquiring more than one language at once in early childhood causes impaired general cognitive development. Although research has found that this is not the case, society and relatives echoing such myths may cause the parents to doubt whether to continue. Equally, widespread exaggerated beliefs such as bilingualism resulting in "bigger, better brains" should be rejected, and a more realistic expectation for parents is that bilingual children will probably gain specific skills such as a greater understanding of language as an abstract system (King & Wright-Fogle 2013: 173). We would also suggest that native-like performance in each language is not a realistic goal, and that a successful bilingual upbringing may promote instead domain-specific competencies in each language (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej et al. 2023: 7), fulfilling the speaker's needs at any specific time in their life. Another common myth among lay people is that bilinguals are equally proficient in both languages, but it is rare to find such an individual. Neither are monolinguals proficient in all the registers and vocabulary of their native language. Additionally, the dominance of one language over the other may change over time depending on the language

of the place of residence, and on "age, circumstance, education, social network, employment and many other factors" (Lowry 2015: 3). Bilinguals are not born translators (Woodward-Smith et al. 2018: 183–184); they may have a domain of specialization in one language which is lacking in the other.

3. FAMILY EXPERIENCES: VARIABLES

Hoff and Core (2013: paragraph 6) maintain that language skills in bilingual children are diverse due to the variability in their language experiences, and that recent research makes it clear that the "variation in the quantity and quality of input in each language affects the rate at which each language is learned". Most children growing up with two languages hear one of them more than they hear the other. This dual language input "creates a common feature of bilingual children's language skills—that they are more advanced in one language than the other". This variability may also depend on factors such as place of residence, parental languages, family usage or custom, and schooling, as well as access to literacy in the home. Language status is important and will be dealt with later in this article.

The family context is key to understanding how bilingualism develops. Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) interviewed 18 families for the first edition of their work on bilingualism in the family (1986), and after a detailed analysis of their answers to a questionnaire, as well as observational sessions, case studies were prepared which illustrate the great number and probably infinite combinations of variables at play in the complicated panorama of bilingual families. Apart from the data the authors collected over the initial period, an interesting addition was made to the second edition of the work (2003), consisting in interviewing the children of these families, some 20 years later, to find out their point of view regarding the bilingual upbringing they had received. The authors had an additional intention present in the second part of the title, *A handbook for parents*, clearly indicating that the objective was to offer guidance for the best possible outcome. Based on their findings they advised prospective bilingual families to compare the case studies with their own situations, and learn from others' experiences. They warned, however, that parents should not be surprised if none of the cases described exactly their unique set of variables, since "bilingualism is a complex phenomenon and the changes that can be rung on it seem infinite" (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 95). The authors visually simplified the complicated linguistic relations of each case study with diagrams showing the language(s) used between the parents, the language used by the mother and the father to the children, the language children used to each parent, and the language used between siblings as they developed. The 18 case studies include different com-

binations of parental native languages, the languages used between parents, if both parents were fluent or not in the other's language, if one of the parental languages coincided with the community language, and if the family had outside help from a carer speaking that language. There were some families who had moved from one parent's country to that of the other parent, bringing about a change in the dynamics of the family language balance. Moving house, even in monolingual situations, often implies logistic and emotional issues, especially as changing schools and leaving one's friends can cause serious harm to the stability of family relationships and identity. Dominance of one of a bilingual's languages over the other is not static: "When a bilingual family moves from one country to another, the pattern of linguistic input to the child may be entirely changed" (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 59). A change in balance may also be observed, for example, after a holiday in the country of the non-dominant language, or after a prolonged visit by a monolingual relative.

In the case studies Harding-Esch & Riley (2003), it was also observed that in adolescence, some children may see their *other* language as something which makes them different or odd, and they might rebel against its use, preferring instead to use the dominant language of the community, in an attempt to fit in. A language can define a person's identity, with emotional connotations, and while positive associations can help children to acquire it, negative experiences can obviously hinder the process. The authors stress that it is important for parents to create a relaxed linguistic environment, so that the *other* language is not perceived negatively. Parents should avoid, for example, scolding a child for speaking to them in a language other than the one they are trying to get them to speak. This requires restraint on the part of parents, who might be tempted to over-correct mistakes, or show disapproval of the mixing of languages. In any case, it should be remembered that language mixing mid-sentence is normal at first, and it does not mean that the child is confused or lazy (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 56). Children are probably trying out different hypotheses by slotting together what seems logical to them for the best effect, and we must remember to see the resulting forms from the child's point of view and not from our own. The authors remind us that "the way a child switches codes reflects the way his two languages serve his communicative ends" (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 143). By continuing with adequate parental input, and an open mind about language learning and progress, language-mixing is usually resolved without any intervention. However, if strict rules are imposed over which language is to be used when and where, this can cause unnecessary tension, and ultimately failure to reach the desired objective.

Crystal (1986: 213) writes of the "remarkable skills children have when they learn a language", estimating that by the end of their fourth year "most bilin-

gual children have reached the same stage of linguistic development in both languages as have their monolingual counterparts". This is very encouraging for parents who are perhaps challenged by relatives who cast doubt on the bilingual experiment. Interference from relatives is another variable rarely mentioned as such in the corresponding literature on bilingualism, but it can undermine the parents' best intentions. Crystal describes the three stages through which bilingual children progress (Crystal 1986: 213). Firstly, the child builds up a list of vocabulary taken from both languages, without there being many equivalents. Secondly, when the bilingual child starts to make two-word sentences, these usually consist of one word from each language. Additional vocabulary is acquired in each language, with more equivalents in a kind of common zone, but morphology and syntax are still a mixture. The third stage is reached when children are able to separate the sounds, grammar and vocabulary of the two languages, are conscious of which language to speak to whom, and are even able to use the different languages to play parents off against each other when it suits them (Crystal 1986: 214).

4. LANGUAGE PRESTIGE

Harding-Esch and Riley (2003: 83-84) discuss the relative status of the pair of languages involved in the bilingual upbringing, both in the family and in the surrounding community. As to what happens when the bilingual process involves languages from different linguistic families, "the particular pair of languages concerned does not make much difference to the eventual outcome" (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 83). Although the pair of languages may be grammatically quite different, the "actual mechanics" of acquisition will not determine to what extent bilingualism will be achieved. However, the authors highlight that a satisfactory bilingual experience may depend much more on the relative status of the pair of languages involved (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 84). Sacrificing a minority language for a majority one may seem like common sense, prioritizing the usefulness of one over the other, but parents should consider the social and emotional benefits of maintaining the lower status language for family reasons (relationships with grandparents and other relatives), as well as cultural traditions associated with that language. In the case of lesser-spoken languages such as Breton, Scots or Basque, the issue is "inevitably political in nature" due to arguments over "the degree of political autonomy of the speakers" (Harding--Esch & Riley 2003: 11). This is not an issue for languages which are perceived as having high prestige, such as world languages, or which have some special economic, religious or cultural value (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 84). A high-

status language can be identified if it is one offered as a subject in secondary education (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 81), and so "few people will criticise the value (as against practicability) of bringing up children as French / English or German / Spanish bilinguals" (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 85). However, there may be negative reactions if the pair of languages includes a minority language, considered by family members or friends as being of lower status. As well as high and low prestige languages, there are also middle prestige languages, often ones associated with cultural and ethnic groups which have settled extensively over a period of time in another territory (for example Scandinavian languages during the period of colonisation of North America). Low prestige languages not only have to prove their usefulness as part of bilingual acquisition, but they also have to overcome prejudice by their speakers and observers who may perceive them as old-fashioned, on the point of dying out, or irrelevant in the modern world (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 85). This often happens with "so-called regional languages" (Harding-Esch & Riley 2003: 85) such as Gaelic in Scotland or Occitan in France, not due to any inherent characteristics of these languages but merely from a practical point of view. Parents intending to bring up bilingual children should be aware of the existence and scale of language prestige described by Harding-Esch and Riley (2003: 77–88) because they and their children will be judged by others according to the relative status of their languages, and unfortunately evaluation by lay observers may undermine the process and affect the necessary commitment of the parents.

5. THE STUDY CONDUCTED

After referring to issues dealt with by researchers, some specific examples taken from the bilingual family experience of one of the authors of this article will be presented. The study focused on some of the variables involved in bilingual development by referring to the circumstances experienced by one family. Both parents were teachers, the father specialised in didactics while the mother taught English, and they agreed on the benefits of a bilingual upbringing. The language used by the parents with each other was Spanish, with the father unable to speak more than a few words of English, and consequently it was decided to follow the one person, one language approach with the child (OPOL). This could have implied that the father (not being in any way fluent in English) might have felt excluded, but this was avoided by patience, on his part, translation or summary when necessary, so that both parents were able to present a united front in spite of using different languages to the child. At first, there were some negative reactions from older relatives who perhaps feared the rearing of a Span-

glish speaker, because this hybrid language is viewed pejoratively within Spain. Their attitude soon changed, however, when they saw how the child was able to switch from one language to the other, and they even began to express pride in his bilingual progress.

The authors present the findings of observations of three siblings: Miguel, Pablo and Daniel, the children of a Spanish father and English mother living in Spain (the lead-author of this article; hence the availability of detailed data). The methodology used for the data collection was the writing of observational diaries in which the linguistic milestones of each child were noted, along with the age in years and months, and any immediate contextualising factors. The use of detailed diaries over approximately seven years, covering the early period of the children's development was inspired by Alvino E. Fantini (1985) whose longitudinal study dealt with the developmental bilingualism of his son. It could be argued that such methodology is lacking in objectivity on the part of the parent-authors. However, parents are ideally situated for capturing the small details of natural everyday interaction in the home and immediate surroundings. Fantini's study was originally his doctoral thesis, later presented as a book. This article aims to be a more modest contribution to the issue of simultaneous bilingualism, offering insight into the unique situation of families who opt for such an experience. It was attempted to also gather audio recordings of some of the examples of linguistic development, but this was unsuccessful due to both technical issues, and the fact that the children would fail to reproduce what had been observed as soon as a microphone was placed in front of them.

The diary for Miguel, the first-born, started at one year and eight months (1:8), and the subsequent diaries for Pablo and Daniel followed a similar pattern and timescale. This age seemed to be a reasonable point at which to start recording data. Though children may babble and produce sounds before this point, it was at this age when Miguel produced his first recognisable words, apart from referencing his parents. His first words were few and only in one language or the other, but not both. However, his comprehension was equal in both languages, and he was able to respond successfully to all "show me x/bring me x" requests. He also used gestures to indicate significant gestures or characteristics mimicking other family members such as grandparents when they were mentioned. From 1:8 onwards, the diaries contain monthly updates.

At 2:1, a rapid increase in production was noted, not only in vocabulary, but also in grammatical and morphological aspects. From 2:2 to 2:5 Miguel's diary records the appearance of two-word utterances, declination of some Spanish verb forms in the present, less use of verbs in English but, in contrast, more incorporation of nouns with adjectives. At this time there were more mixed utterances combining elements from each language. The important factor of input due to

visits to and from English-speaking grandparents was associated with bursts in production in English. An interesting observation was that even when playing alone, Miguel used fragments of English, which would seem to indicate that his use of English was spontaneous and not only to please his mother. Gradually, over subsequent months other milestones were observed, as can be seen in the following highly summarised table.

Table 1. Summary of some major milestones for Miguel

Age (years and months)	Examples of milestones (E = English; S = Spanish)
3:1	E. Personal pronouns; S. past, present and future; E. negative imperatives; E./S. less mixing; E./S. equivalent numbers; E. definite and indefinite articles (previously random S. articles attached to E. nouns).
3:8	E. difficulties with interrogative word order; E. difficulties with past of irregular verbs.
4:9	E. More use after 3 weeks in the UK; E./S. interference, as in referring to gymnastics hoops as *arrows*, based on S. *aros*.
5:3	E. Successfully reads out loud and answers comprehension questions on *Lucky Dip*, Book 1, Ladybird Sunstart Reading Scheme (Murray 1974). Recommended age 3-5.
5:8	On a two-week visit to the UK, Miguel acts as interpreter between his father and local children at the playground.

Source: current study.

The diary continued to record linguistic development until 7:6, at the end of the second year of primary education, with annotations being more spaced out than monthly updates because major changes became fewer. At this age Miguel was able to invent simple jokes in English using wordplay, and English-Spanish jokes using false friends.

The following tables (Tables 2–4) illustrate some examples of the stages of development, broadly following the phases mentioned by Crystal (1986: 213). Vocabulary only known in English or in Spanish, not in both, was quite specific for Miguel's needs, and depended on whom he was speaking to and the topic talked about. This is similar to adults' switching between registers, using a particular vocabulary for certain needs such as professional ones, and speaking differently in more informal contexts. The common zone, in which Miguel knew and used equivalents from each language, was quite small at first. It seems reasonable to assume that he did not need duplicates in order to communicate in each language with the corresponding parent.

Table 2. Miguel 1:10 (1 year and 10 months)

Only in English	Common zone: both languages	Only in Spanish
Water	car + *coche*	*¡mira!*
Balloon	grandad + *abuelo*[1]	*Grúa*
Moon	Mummy + *mamá*[2]	*uno, do (= dos)* [counting]

Explanation:

[1] From Miguel's point of view, grandad and *abuelo* were two different persons, paternal and maternal grandfathers, rather than equivalents.

[2] He used "Mummy" to address his mother, but to talk about her to Spanish-speakers he used "mi mamá".

Source: current study.

The entry for 5 months later shows that Miguel had acquired more vocabulary in the common zone, while still being very specific in the words and expressions he found most useful in the context of each language and addressee.

Table 3. Miguel 2:3

English	Common zone: both	Spanish
fish and chips	come here + *ven*	*tú no tienes*
Letter	tower + *torre*	Koptro (= helicóptero)
/ku:l/ (= school)	yes + *sí*	*payaso*
'elo car (=yellow car)[1]	empty + *vacío*	*quiero agua*[2]
–	full + *lleno*	–
–	book + *libro*	–
–	penny + *peseta*	–
–	key + *llave*	–
–	toys + *juguetes*	–
–	"Glafas" (blending of glasses and *gafas*)	–

Explanation:

[1] Only in English because the mother drove a yellow car, and the father a less distinctive one.

[2] The Spanish request for water (*agua*) prevailed. This met the need with more possible addressees, being more economical and effective from the child's point of view.

Source: current study.

Illustrative of the second stage described by Crystal (1986) are Miguel's first sentences, taking elements from each language.

Table 4. Miguel's first sentences 2:3 to 3:1

Mixed sentences	Age
abre la door; *estoy* looking *a los hombres*	2.3
quiero play *con estos* toys	2:10
tengo que hacer a house	3:1

Source: current study.

The parents' reaction to these mixtures was to repeat the phrase entirely in one language, without any implication of criticism or correction, and gradually these mixtures disappeared perhaps because some other listeners, such as the part-time Spanish carer, did not understand them. If she expressed incomprehension, Miguel would correctly join together the Spanish elements to achieve communication. It could be claimed, however, that his first mixtures were grammatically sound, from his point of view, as in the example "*estoy* looking", in which he had made a seamless graft of the Spanish verb "to be" + English present participle / gerund.

Crystal's (1986) third stage was reached by Miguel quite quickly. At 3:8, and after a visit from his monolingual English-speaking grandparents, he started to ask how to say items in English or Spanish, demonstrating that he was aware that there were two systems with names and users. Previously he had only referred to how his mother or father spoke. He did, however, have problems with word order: *What it is? / *How it is?, probably due to interference from Spanish (*¿Qué es? / ¿Cómo es?*), and the past tenses of irregular verbs were problematic (*I heared it, / *I seed it / *I falled), but in this aspect he was at the same stage as monolingual children of this age.

When his brother Pablo was born, Miguel was three and a half, and the family language balance changed. From birth Pablo was surrounded by two people speaking English (mother and Miguel) and two speaking Spanish (father and the part-time carer), and so, in theory, there would be fairly equal input. However, Pablo followed his own style and pace, and it seemed irrelevant how much of each language he was hearing and using. Being the first-born, second, or subsequent child is yet another variable to consider, as family dynamics change. As in many aspects of child-rearing, parents often make more effort with the first child, centring their attention on her / him, and when subsequent children arrive they

abandon some of their practices because they were unsuccessful, or simply due to lack of time. Pablo's early phases may have been conditioned by this situation.

However, at 2:6 Pablo was able to quickly accommodate both mother and father in the same expression of urgency: "Mummy, here no, *papa, aquí no*". He was conscious of the existence of two languages though he did not refer to them by name. On one occasion he excitedly reported that on TV there was somebody talking like his mother. He must have previously thought that his mother's way of speaking was unique or at least a rarity. At 5:8, if someone tried to practice on him their imperfect English he would usually answer in Spanish, yet when his father tried to say something in English, he would congratulate him but correct his pronunciation.

Pablo had started to attend kindergarten at 3:3 and almost immediately a change in sibling linguistic relations began. Until then the two brothers had played together using either language, mainly depending on what kind of activity was taking place. As the elder brother Miguel patiently corrected Pablo's pronunciation, syntax and morphology in both English and Spanish. The language chosen when acting out games involving astronauts, policemen, soldiers, etc. was usually Spanish, probably due to the input from television jargon, but other activities could be in either language. When Pablo started infants' school at 5 years old, he began using more Spanish with his brother, especially incorporating playground language pertaining to differences of opinion or organisation of roles in games. Gradually the siblings used Spanish as their usual language of communication to each other, persisting even to this day. However, they continued to speak to each parent in the appropriate language. When a third son was born, with an age difference of 12 years from Miguel and 8 years from Pablo, they both took it on themselves to speak to him in English. In this respect, Daniel enjoyed the benefits of having three sources of input in English, which was even more advantageous than being the first-born. Today, the sibling dynamics are varied, depending on who is present. Miguel and Pablo use Spanish reciprocally; communication between Miguel and Daniel, and Pablo and Daniel takes place in English. However, when any of the siblings speaks to a mixed audience consisting of his brother(s) and monolingual Spanish speakers, the conversation takes place in Spanish, in deference to the monolinguals, meaning that Daniel addresses and replies in Spanish with his siblings. However, as soon as the siblings are alone again, they revert to the language use described above. Macleroy Obied (2009: 705) reports how siblings may shift the language balance in the home and "build bridges or barriers to language acquisition", with older siblings acting as mediators of both languages, supporting younger siblings in their language acquisition. This sibling bridge-building and shifting is what happened, and still happens, in this particular family.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the question of language prestige had no impact on the bilingual upbringing of the three brothers in the examples cited (Tables 1 to 4), since English and Spanish belong to the same high prestige band. Though Spanish was the usual language of the neighbourhood, mastery of English was universally valued as a future asset, as evidenced by the popularity of extra English classes for children, adolescents and adults in the city's numerous English language academies. The place of residence was in Galicia, one of Spain's 17 autonomous communities where the Galician language is recognised officially and promoted by the local government and other institutions. Galician is taught at school, with some other subjects also being taught through the same language. It could be said that in the context of this bilingual region both Spanish and Galician are considered prestige languages, with Spanish legislation stating, moreover, that Galician citizens have a duty to know the Galician language and the right to use it (Ley de Normalización Lingüística 3/1983). The three siblings had access to Galician in their everyday lives, and especially in the village of their paternal grandparents. Galician was the choice when the sociolinguistic context required its use. They were never told which language to use when visiting the village; they naturally fitted in with what was being spoken at the time.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the light of current research on bilingual development in the family, King and Wright -Fogle (2013: 172) conclude that though some family members may still cast doubt on bilingualism, fearing language delay and confusion, research suggests that monolingual and bilingual children meet major language developmental milestones at similar times. There is, they maintain, no evidence to support the fear of confusion being caused in bilingual children. The authors state that "On the contrary, use of two languages in the same conversation has been found to be a sign of mastery of both languages" (173). As to input, the authors recommend that relying on television and other audio-visual sources is probably not a productive way of acquiring a language, and that human input is much more important.

The eighteen case studies elaborated by Harding-Esch and Riley (2003: 93–134) were presented by these authors as "linguistic family portraits" showing the variety and variability of the many factors involved in raising bilingual children. Their intention was to make available an appraisal of the arrangements found by each family as viable in their particular situations. It was hoped that the accumulated experience of the families could enable more informed decisions regarding parental practices. The recommendations in this handbook for

parents were in fact considered by the parents of the three children cited above, even though none of the case studies coincided with their particular situation.

The linguistic experiences of the siblings presented in this article show that though each developed differently, considering some of the variables involved (place in the family, parental languages, amount of input, contact with speakers of English, or country of residence), they acquired both languages without any kind of developmental delay. Their bilingual upbringing enabled them later to apply strategies to the formal learning of a third language (French as a foreign language) in the school context. In addition, they had no difficulty in keeping separate their two linguistically related community languages (Spanish and Galician, the latter being the language of their paternal grandparents). They learnt different ways of handling the linguistic world around them, and as they grew up they assimilated some of the culture and traditions attached to each language, creating their own hybrid linguistic identity. Their ability to manage more than one language from early childhood can be considered satisfactory, even though none of them went on to be linguists, each choosing a different scientific or technical career. However, they have all encountered moments in adult experience when a bilingual background has proved to be an important asset in their professional lives. We consider that this is a positive characteristic shared by most bilinguals after early exposure to two or more languages in the family context, and it could be an encouraging sign for parents about to embark on the bilingual experience.

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Przyswajanie języka i dwujęzyczność w rodzinie: studium przypadku

Abstrakt. W artykule omówiono niektóre zmienne związane z równoczesnym przyswajaniem dwóch języków u dzieci. Wśród rozważanych zmiennych są języki ojczyste rodziców (ten sam język lub różne języki), kraj zamieszkania (i czy odpowiada jednemu z języków rodziców, czy żadnemu z nich), prestiż przypisany któremuś z języków, status większościowy lub mniejszościowy w kontekście społecznym oraz postawy prezentowane przez członków każdej rodzinny i osób ją otaczających. Ponad połowa populacji świata używa dwóch lub więcej języków w codziennym życiu, co oznacza, że dwujęzyczność nie jest rzadkim zjawiskiem (Van Wechem & Halbach: 2014). Jednak osoby z otoczenia rodzin dzieci znajdujących się w sytuacji dwujęzycznej często

wyrażają obawy dotyczące przyszłych kompetencji językowych dzieci, martwią się, że nie będą one mówiły poprawnie w żadnym z języków. Badania pokazują jednak, że ich rozwój językowy nie jest opóźniony ani też takie dzieci nie są w żaden sposób poszkodowane przez swoją dwujęzyczność. Co więcej, ich zdolność do zarządzania więcej niż jednym językiem może stać się cennym atutem w życiu. Autorki przedstawiają dane ze studium przypadku trzech braci, pokazujące, że przyswajanie języka u nich przebiegało zgodnie z etapami obserwowanymi u dzieci jednojęzycznych i nie było powodu do obaw o opóźnienie zdolności poznawczych.

Słowa kluczowe: dzieci dwujęzyczne, zmienne w przyswajaniu wielojęzyczności, praktyki wielojęzyczne w rodzinach.

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