

## Bilinguism: An Extra Chance in Life

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**Abstract:** Bilingualism is an interesting issue in the light of the psychology studies. Bilingualism is an advantage when taught in childhood. Children tend to better and easily learn new languages in their first eight years of life. At the age of 3–6 years, one of the things that children find entertaining is to learn new things and this can happen without strain.

To explore the matter of bilingualism, this study will rely on the hypothesis below: “Bilingual children have more advantages than single language children”. For exploration of this hypothesis in the research will raise some research questions. The methodology that will be used to study is qualitative. Case studies with bilingual children and adults, interviews, observations and half structured questionnaires will serve as tools for data collection. To present a wider frame of bilingualism and its advantages on our global society this study will be consulted with various studies, articles, political documents, articles and reports within and outside Albania.

Multilingualism in Europe, whether into the society or education, it is becoming more and more a reality; one happens to find a language mixture into workplaces or school classes, consequently a mixture of cultures. If you want to teach two languages to our child, then our positioning is crucial. We should feel confident in that language yourself in the first place, whether you are a teacher, parent or a daycare educator. Only by doing this, the child can feel confident. It is not smart to just try and teach a language to a child. The language needs to be his/her world and life experience. Once the language is experienced by the child, only then the child really learned it.

This study will be a thorough search about bilingualism issues. Besides the quantitative data, this study will bring a unique approach and important quality data. Specific case studies of bilingual children and adults will bring important data for the advantages of bilingualism when taught in childhood. It should be emphasized that this study cannot be generalized in terms of the topics but will bring data which are scarce in Albania. Bilingualism is a new field of view under the point of view of psychology for Albania and recommended that after this study to continue other studies for bilingualism, for this for personal and in the same time as global wealth.

**Key words:** bilingualism, language, child, childhood, parent, teacher

### 1. More Languages, More Opportunities

The teaching of a second language in homes, pre-school, schools should take an important place. “Learning new languages is the basis in shaping a new and perspective thinking”, says Ruth Tobias, a pedagogue of the Language University in Germany. She thinks if one knows more language than his own, he has granted many opportunities to himself.

Bilingualism has been considered as a priority over the centuries. The high-class families or kings would send their children to teachers who taught them philosophy, diplomacy as well as other foreign languages such as Latin or Greek.

This tendency of learning languages has been inherited throughout centuries. Nowadays we encounter it too, but not as a tendency and a class division but often as a school or university education; as an “integration and survival” need for the emigrant families.

In various countries such as in Albania the learning of foreign language and especially that of English is mandatory for Master graduation or higher. Thus a standard is set for scientific researches to be updated and deepened.

The bilingualism model as an educational service typology for school children has started to be applied mainly after 1997, as a part of the education reformation in the country. One thing we can point here is that while in communism the schools included 2 up to 3 hours a week the teaching of Russian and French on their curriculum.

## **2. Bilingualism over Centuries**

Bilingualism over the centuries has been considered as an advantage. Upper-class families or kings would send their children to teachers, who would teach them philosophy, diplomacy as well as other foreign languages, such as: Latin, Greek etc.

This tendency of Language learning has been inherited over the centuries. Various kingdoms hired teachers for their children, not only for the art of war, but for other languages too, in order to prepare them to face different policies in the future

The researcher who developed the study has a personal experience with bilingual children as well as contacts with families with this experience, thus marriages of people from different nationalities and migrated families having to teach their children not only their native language but that of the country they moved to.

## **3. Basic Principles and Impacts in Language Learning**

If a child is independently taught two languages, which can naturally and stimulatingly happen, it is of a great importance to follow some basic principles, if we want the lesson to be successful. The language development in a child reflects a particular weight whether emotionally or linguistically. Thus, the parent-child connections becomes stronger. Of course, the stronger the parent-child relationship, the more lovable is the respective language for the child.

If the child does not always seem active in one language, he may understand that language, but may not want to speak it, and this is always associated with a positive or negative emotion that a language transmits to him. According to Kielhöfer & Jonekeit, there is a bilingual “Prestizhe (socialprestige) social prestige impact. The acceptance of the language from the social circle or society where the bilingual talks plays an important role regarding the bilingualism. If one of the languages spoken would be more accepted within the social prestige or social group, this would cause a negative positioning of the bilingualism and a held back to use the less accepted language (Kielhöfer & Jonekeit, 1983, pp. 16, 23).

The learning of the second language from a child often depends pretty much from the impact of the person speaking that language in the society or place, where he is teaching that child. If the person has a “backseat

position” in that social group, the same will his language be considered. As result this influences the child in evaluating that language.

Thus, it considerably depends from the parents or teachers who help the child. They should teach the child to appreciate languages or cultures, in order to create a balance between the languages. It is important for the child to learn the language with other people besides those of family, for example: with the babysitter, or other caring persons in the family. In this case it is important that while respecting the child’s age they can use various language learning materials, such as: Illustrated storybooks, videotapes, games that will serve in improving the language, but at the same time not ignoring the other well-managed language.

It is important to stimulate the child into learning the weaker language besides the stronger one, not only in speaking it, but to read and write it likewise. This is where the support of parents is highly needed for the child to exercise and practice it. As we’ve mentioned above, the weaker language not only must be stimulated, but the family should go on a trip to the nation of the spoken language, which help the child not only to be in contact with that language, but to emotionally make that language or culture more lovable (Cunningham-Andersson, 2004, p. 76).

#### **4. How Does Language Learning Function**

Children tend to better and easily learn new languages in their first eight years of life. At the age of 3-6 years, one of the things that children find entertaining is to learn new things and this can happen without strain. Everyone in their life gets at least one native language as a gift, effortlessly, but lucky are those who have been given the opportunity for more than one. Small children, observe or study the languages with more focus and attention in their own way. They hear what and how their parents speak and so they are unconsciously influenced by language and culture. Children have the ability to understand a language very quickly and often without actively using it.

Since the age of one and a half children understand more than you are actually telling them. Even though sometimes it seems as if the child does not actively respond, language is still there and the child practices it and while he/she speaks, it improves it. Children are surrounded by languages, even though they are different. They can recognize and understand the different languages at their early age. Bilingual children differentiate and recognize which language they will be using. They do not need extra time to master and be fluent in both languages.

#### **5. Code-switching as a Distinct Indicator for Bilingualism**

It was mentioned above that if you get to meet bilingual people, they often and easily use the language switch into social circles or similar social groups. Regarding the Bilingualism phenomenon, along with the Code-Switching they are also followed by other occurrences. Hamer & Blanc show another indicator named Code-Mixing (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, p. 58).

Until 1970, Code-Switching or Code-Mixing was considered as grammatical errors or sentence mistakes. These two factors were later treated whether from empirical studies or theoretically and later were accepted as phenomena that occur while dealing with bilingual people (Hamers & Black, 2000, p. 258).

The child has a developed skill of bilingualism as he grows up with it and the changing of the respective language occurs naturally and without any effort.

Maurice Gramond, who in one of his letters in 1908, after the birth of his son, recommends that parents should each speak their native language, followed such principle.

In my research I have noticed that it is more efficient to use the forementioned system. If parents talk to their child, S., in different languages, respectively German and Albanian, it does not create confusion, but at the age of 7, as the family goes on vacation to Italy, at some friends for a week, it was noticed that the child S. not only was he using his body gestures, but started using some simple sentences in Italian, a language that he had previously only sporadically heard from friends or visitors who would come to visit their home.

In case of bilingual children, who live in the same area or in a certain state for a long time and they go to a kindergarten or at school on that country, the language of that country seems to predominate. Whether in the case of the child S., or even in other cases with other children, it turns out that the language of the country where he is attending the kindergarten or school predominates, but it is advisable for the family to systematically deal with the other language which seems more ignored.

So, it is important for both languages to dominate as much as they would without the attendance of a school of a certain language, because the child can directly and effortlessly learn both languages, whether from his mother, or his father. Even in cases where a child seems to have weakened on one language, it is very important that parents, if they want that language to have the same weight in their children, they should motivate them to travel to the place of the “weaker language”, so that contact with the language, whether the language of father or mother, to remain and deepen more.

A good method would be the friendship group or family who have children of the same age and where parents have the same profile. So if family is unable to travel to the place of the “weaker language”, their child can associate and play with friends, who speak the same language, thus easily maintaining it. At that time not only the language is maintained, but the culture and custom too.

As the bilingual speakers who speak the same language meet, it is observed that people do not focus on their dialogue to speak only one language, thus the language they know or that the whole group knows, but instead they “jump” from one language to the other, altering it accordingly. This change is called *Code-Switching* and is a unique feature of bilingual speakers.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion the bilinguism is priceless and has long term value not only for the integration of people and nations with one another, but in curing or preventing brain diseases.

### 6.1 Some Conclusions from a 2013 Research Conducted by Alma Vëgeli with Students (23 Students of Age 17 and 22 Students of Age 16) and Teachers from Various Schools in Albania

- 14% of teachers share that learning an extra language stimulates more development chances.
- 43% of teachers share that children have more chances to communicate with each other.
- 30% of teachers share that children’s vocabulary increases.
- 91% of the students do not have difficulty in learning two languages at the same time and show no difficulty in learning on the subject.
- 44% of the students share that studying in two languages gives you more chances of developing.
- 17% of the students share the connection of the advantages with knowledge, vocabulary enrichment and employment.

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