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The advantages and challenges of childhood bilingualism

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Budapest
2024

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Abstract

The phenomena of multilingualism and multiculturalism are as old as languages and cultures themselves. This study strives to pinpoint general and personal benefits of how childhood bilingualism and multiculturalism tend to be beneficial or bring on challenges, as a child and perhaps later, during adulthood. The study is carried out by using the method of triangulation. Personal interviews with now adult but once bilingual children; a focus group interview with participants sharing a multicultural upbringing; and the observation of teaching two teen-aged Chinese children English, in the form of private lessons. The findings suggest an attitudinal change towards languages and cultures as getting older. A child might bear mixed feelings towards the phenomena, yet adulthood transforms these experiences into true advantages. The research concludes that the major benefit of learning languages and being involved in various cultures is developing an open-minded mental outlook.

Introduction

Many of our ancestors 100 years ago viewed languages as tools that might take away from a country's national or a person's value. Also, mostly only the elite had access to study foreign languages, languages which had been declared as prestigious. The world wars especially, left people with the urge not to draw any extra attention, not to stand out, to melt into whichever place they were at that point, by following what that certain culture demanded, along with the certain language spoken there. However, the coming years were full of hope and change. Mass movement overtook the planet. Various reasons stimulated people to relocate. Excitement, diversity, the beginning of a new era. Once great enemies, now neighbours. Cultures, languages blending, people finding themselves open towards each other. Learning new languages became a common goal and teaching languages to children was the obvious way to ease the process. That raised the question, however, if a child becomes confused or advanced due to being exposed to multiple languages. Professionals, parents, caretakers have all been examining children in both scientific and everyday settings. Previously, science was mostly rather against multilingual upbringing. Then as time passed, more detailed examinations with more differentiated methods provided a broader understanding of what happens to a multilingual child. Nowadays, acquiring more languages during early childhood is acclaimed as beneficial.

I aspire to become an English teacher who I can respect. My goal is to partake in an educational environment where I trust that the child feels safe, is eager to learn, and is inspired. I am eager to establish a pedagogy that proves to bring the desired results and where the child loves learning English. My motivation for this research was to acquire a better understanding of how cultures and languages affect individuals. To provide adequate education for my current and future students, I feel there is a need to delve into what second language acquisition and being involved with multiple cultures can lead to, in the case of a child and later during adulthood. I believe that the significance of this research lies in finding the core advantages and benefits people find in learning languages, which can lead to developing a better working educational curriculum, where the pupil can feel as if they are studying a language for their own good, and not because of what society, schools, social groups, parents, peers, bosses, strangers say.

As mentioned, numerous questions, concerns, myths, and facts exist regarding when and how language shall be developed and integrated into a person's life. In the depths of lexical findings, one might lose a primal and genuine motive of being eager to find out about languages and

cultures, and the appetite for wishing to be involved with them. The main goal of this study is to shed light on the primal joys and delights of bilingualism and multiculturalism. I intend to create a thorough overview of the historical, biological, social, and personal factors of the whole of language and its value.

1. Literature review

1.1 Language

1.1.1 What is language?

Arsenian (1937) quotes Sapir, saying “Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations.” (p. 3). What is language? A system of signs for communication. According to Kovács & Trentinné (2016), it can be declared that one way or another, this “system” dominates every aspect of our lives. Oxford English Dictionary (2024) provides the following description: “The system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure” (para. 1. a). De Jong (2014) highlights how Tserdanelis and Wong note that children acquire language automatically and that one can use language without thought. According to Hoff (2005) “Language, for adults, is a well-practised routine.” (p. 52). No other living creature on this planet possesses such a precious gift as language (Futrell, 2022; Hoff, 2005). Stroke patients, who suffer both verbal and physical deficits, tend to have a stronger desire to reclaim their ability to communicate than to be able to walk unassisted (KnowNeuropsychology, 2021).

Futrell (2022) suggests that an animal might be able to produce 10 different sounds, be that as it may, an adult knows more than 20,000 words. Hoff (2005) explains how humans exploit this unique instrument to engage to the fullest in social aptitudes. Society exists because language does. Even when people lack a target language for communication, the interactions tend to create a language spontaneously. According to de Jong (2014), language is the power that gives words to thoughts, voice to ideas, and expressions to feelings. Kovács & Trentinné (2016) point out that one starts to learn a language almost right after being born, starts the journey of acquiring the great phenomenon, and carries on fulfilling this experience until death.

Arsenian (1937) notes that language development has some sort of ancient sacredness to it. As it is a personal experience it is just as well a racial one. Futrell (2022) reveals that our predecessor started with sounds, sounds gave birth to words, words grew into sentences. This resonates with what Bialystok (2011) says, how infants’ cries turn into babbles, then babbles turn into words, words clip together, and all of the sudden the child speaks in sentences. According to Christiansen & Chater (2022), languages change continuously and colorfully.

New words and phrases appear, aged ones disappear. Words' original meanings shift and new meanings might unfold. Moreover, Arsenian (1937) points out how new concepts emerge, and the scope of thinking extends.

Hoff (2005) provides two main views to address how old the “institute” of language is and where it comes from. The ‘adaptations’ view is based on natural selection, meaning that language-using hominid ancestors were given some advantage in reproduction and survival over the ones who did not. The other approach is called ‘descent with modifications’. This view says that humans today are capable of using language thanks to their non-linguistic ancestors who must have had certain competencies which were the harbingers of the roots the whole of language could stand upon. According to Futrell (2022) what our forefathers started by imitating sounds and/or gesturing gave birth to the monument of language. Blanco (2021a) discloses how this has led to our current knowledge of around 7000 different forms of language on the planet.

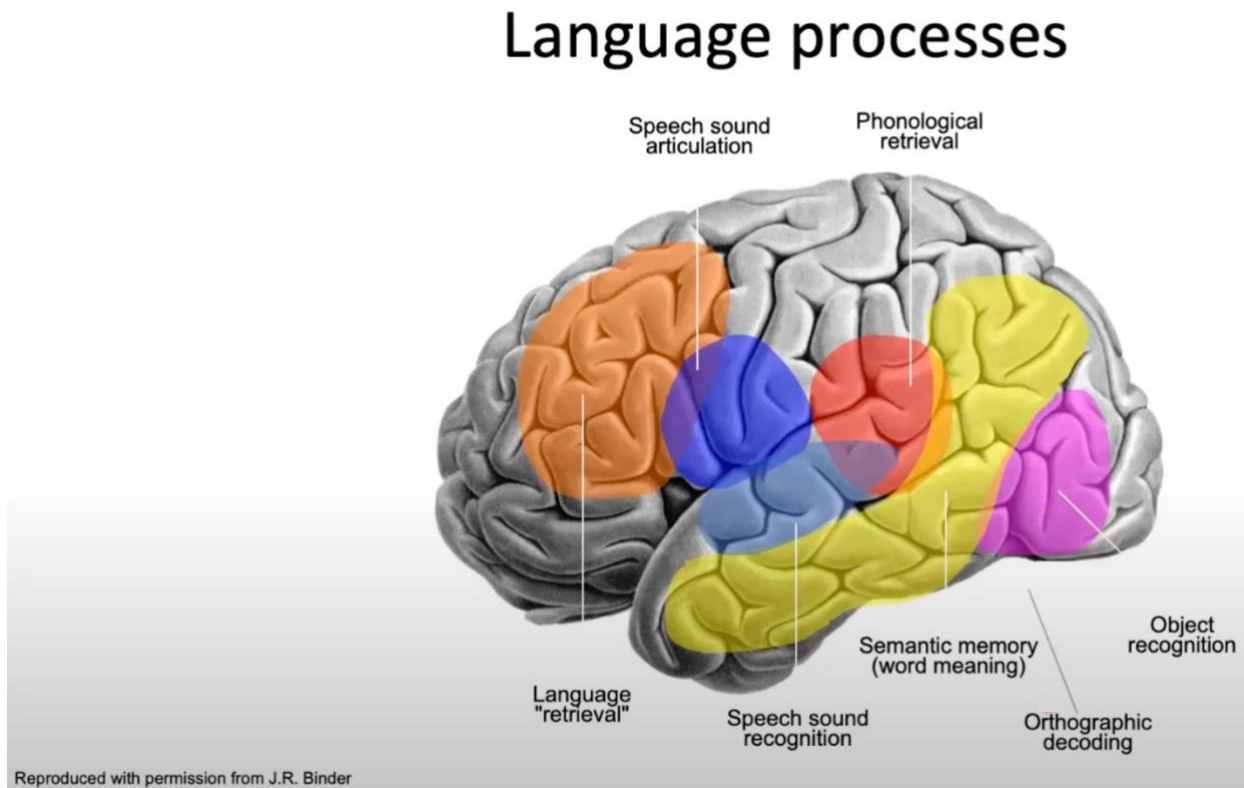
1.1.2 The biology of language

One might think of language and thought as one. Logical and abstract thinking would be quite handicapped without language, although thought exceeds the boundaries of language with its possibilities and range. It is both peripheral, central, muscular, and neural. An adaptive behaviour, the organism's function (Arsenian, 1937).

Hoff (2005) provides aid to answer the question: Where does language live? It is unmistakable that language is a resident of the brain, yet to locate it precisely in the great maze of the mind is much more difficult. What is more, language is actually “stored” in varied parts of the brain (see Figure 1). When it comes to pinpointing which brain segment is responsible for storing and producing language, we must thank a French physician, named Broca, who made a breakthrough discovery back in 1861. Many findings regarding brain function localization could have possibly been done by examining specific brain injury patients: drawing conclusions from the certain area where the brain had suffered damage and the following symptoms, perhaps handicap, the patient experienced. Broca examined several left-hemisphere trauma cases. In all the cases the patient ended up having “broken language”. These revelations of his, that “loss of language is typically a result of brain injury to the left, but not to the right hemisphere” (p. 49) are valid allegations today.

Figure 1

Language process locations in the brain



Note. The slide shows the areas of the brain where specific aspects of language process take place. From “The Neuroanatomy of language”, by KnowNeuropsychology, 2021, July 20, YouTube.

The human body's significant way to operate is using contralateral connections which means that the right side of the brain is responsible for the left side of the body and the other way around. Because of this, when different sounds were streamed into undamaged adults' two ears during experiments, there was a right ear advantage which indicates left hemisphere dominance. Experiments on sign language users who had suffered brain damage, and neuroimaging studies of deaf signers also confirmed, regardless of modality, language specialization takes place in the left hemisphere. On the other hand, visual-spatial information is processed in the right hemisphere. This occurrence of one hemisphere being more important in comparison to the other one for peculiar competencies is referred to as functional asymmetry (Hoff, 2005).

Although as more and more experiments were made regarding the connection between language and the brain, it became clear that in some cases, right hemisphere damage leads to aphasia (critical impairment of language function), furthermore, left hemisphere mishap does not necessarily result in aphasia (Hoff, 2005). One possible explanation for this is that, as it turns out, for 95% of right-hand users, language is specialized in the left hemisphere, while this is only true for 60-70% of left-hand users (KnowNeuropsychology, 2021). Another reason that suggests the earlier-mentioned exceptions is that there are language functions shared by the right hemisphere (Hoff, 2005). To name these functions: the left hemisphere is responsible for syntax (Hoff, 2005) – for instance, word order following (KnowNeuropsychology, 2021) – while semantics (Hoff, 2005) – meaning of the words, unambiguous knowledge of the world (KnowNeuropsychology, 2021) – and pragmatics (Hoff, 2005) – humour and sarcasm, meaning context connection, the language's social aspects (KnowNeuropsychology, 2021) – are specialized in the right hemisphere (Hoff, 2005).

Exciting 'side effects' of languages are dialects and accents. Oxford English Dictionary (2023) refers to dialect as rustic speech or speech of a specific province. "One which differs from the standard or literary form of the language in respect of vocabulary, pronunciation, idiom." (para. 2) How are accents different? According to Dictionary.com (2023), accent means to speak or sing in a distinct way that is shared between groups who are connected geographically or by a social class. The main difference between the two lies in the use of the language. While accents only affect pronunciation, dialects bear a peculiar set of grammar and vocabulary as well. "Often, an accent is described as being a subset of a dialect in the same way that a dialect is a subset of a language." (para. 9).

1.1.3 Language development

Language, first developed as a means of social communication, is later internalised and becomes a crucial tool in the shaping of cognitive processes relevant for the elaboration of the abstract symbolic system which will enable the child to organise thought. (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, pp. 82–83)

Chomsky (2006) presses that language is a structure of habit, and should be developed by repetition and slow training. He follows up by stating that a child discovers a language system's rules by receiving and deciphering the input. He divides language knowledge into two units: competence and performance. Competence is more of an idle state of language acquisition. A

capability; but not necessarily a collection of skills actually used. On the contrary, performance is supposed to be the real language one is able to produce. Only an adult monolingual speaker may possess linguistic competence. Darwin (cited in Kovács & Trentinné, 2016) considered language a mixture of instinct and art. Donaldson (cited in Kovács & Trentinné, 2016), a representative of the behaviourist view, thought that acquiring a language has a lot to do with the environment the child grows up in and that it is “merely habit-formation”. Kovács & Trentinné (2016) note down the monocompetence theory, according to which linguistic skills only have a limited amount of space in the human brain. Those who believe this theory to be valid, claim that learning a new language results in developing a negative effect on the mother tongue.

“The human brain is made for learning languages, plural.” (Blanco, 2021a, para. 4). Yet, just as it is not easy to delineate language, it is complicated to identify the finest ways to teach language (de Jong, 2014). Language can easily feel like vocabulary and grammar (Blanco, 2021b), although the core of a language are communication and self-expression, therefore real-life applications are essential when it comes to language learning (de Jong, 2014). Primary caretakers as well as social context have the largest impact on the language-learning child. Socialization occurs as the routines of interactions structure situations. As these routines take place the child gets to be provided with applicable methods of communication and linguistic input (Hamers & Blanc, 2000).

1.2 Bilingualism in general

1.2.1 Definition of bilingualism

The psychologist, linguist, or biologist is likely to realize that bilingualism – or language itself – must be more than some type of complex ‘instinct’ nor will concepts like social-class differences, ethnolinguistic backgrounds or even sociolinguistic experiences by themselves be adequate explanations. (Lambert, 2000, p. xii)

The phenomenon of a person being able to speak more than one language, originates from the first case of two people who spoke different languages, mutually understanding their traffic (Arsenian, 1937). Baker (2011) phrases the following way: “Since a bicycle has two wheels and binoculars are for two eyes, it would seem that bilingualism is simply about two languages. Multilingualism is then about three or more languages.” (p. 2). However, he proceeds to say that he aims to discuss that controlling two or more languages is not as easy as owning two eyes or wheels.

A condition resulting from using multiple linguistic codes (together with dialects) during interaction. On one hand, bilingualism can be viewed as a social and psychological experience (Butler & Hakuta, 2004). On the other hand, we can look at bilingualism (and multilingualism) as an individual and as a social experience. To see how might being mono-, bi- or multilingual affect a person's cognition, individual bilingualism should be delved into. On the other hand, to see through social psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics, education, geography, and politics, one has to unravel the 'group' perspective. These groups may be found located in a particular territory as we can see it, for instance in Basque, Spain. Other times such groups might be scattered across nations; the Chinese people in the United States provide an excellent example of this case (Baker, 2011).

Küçükler (2018) found, using Cook's questionnaire, that two universities' both monoglot and bilingual students' answers suggested that a country with a bilingual population is reckoned to be more successful. Success as what economic resources are available and what the country's residents do for a living. However, participants of the questionnaire also suggested that many different language speakers of one country may lead to cultural diversity, which also suggests diversification where the repercussions are economical in nature. On the contrary, the research also showed how participants support finding prosperity in diversity.

1.2.2 The value of languages

Linguist and anthropologist Rudolph Troike made the familiar observation: "No dialect is inherently better or more adequate or more logical than another, just as no language is inherently superior to another." Similarly, Einar Haugen, a Harvard University professor of linguistics, stated, "The first step to applying our best scientific knowledge to language problems is to realize that no man's speech is inferior, only different." (Porter, 2017, p. 10).

There are uniting and segregating forces, which influence civilization. In one respect there is the need for fluent intercommunication, then again, there is also self-determination, democracy, and nationalism (Arsenian, 1937). Some think of language as national identity's key symbol and see it as a badge of loyalty. For these individuals, bilingualism may seem like an obstacle. Contrariwise, Baker (2011) enhances that an oppositional viewpoint has been emerging. Its goal is to belong to a bigger whole, forming more of a global identity instead of a purely national one. According to Bialystok (2001) at numerous times and places, foreign languages were introduced in education for certain purposes and were declared as tools to boost a child's intelligence. French, because of cultural enjoyment, Greek, for historical and literary reasons,

Latin, for accurate mathematics. “Traditionally, being educated was equivalent to being well versed in classical languages only.” (Kovács & Trentinné, 2016, p. 33).

First due to conquest and migration, later because of colonization, annexation of land, and immigration, people using different languages found themselves being hurled together, contacting daily with each other (Arsenian, 1937). The population started showing mass movements during the 20th century. Economic, political, and other reasons ignited the people. Early attitudes regarding the moving around were that those who settle down in a different country shall assimilate to the ‘host’ society, become monocultural and -lingual. This process goes by the name ‘melting-pot’ theory. Alternative concepts emerged, which have been contributing to endowing society with multilingualism and multiculturalism, although the ‘melting-pot’ view has not been completely overthrown especially when a bilingual individual finds oneself in a monolingually-oriented society (Miller, 2014).

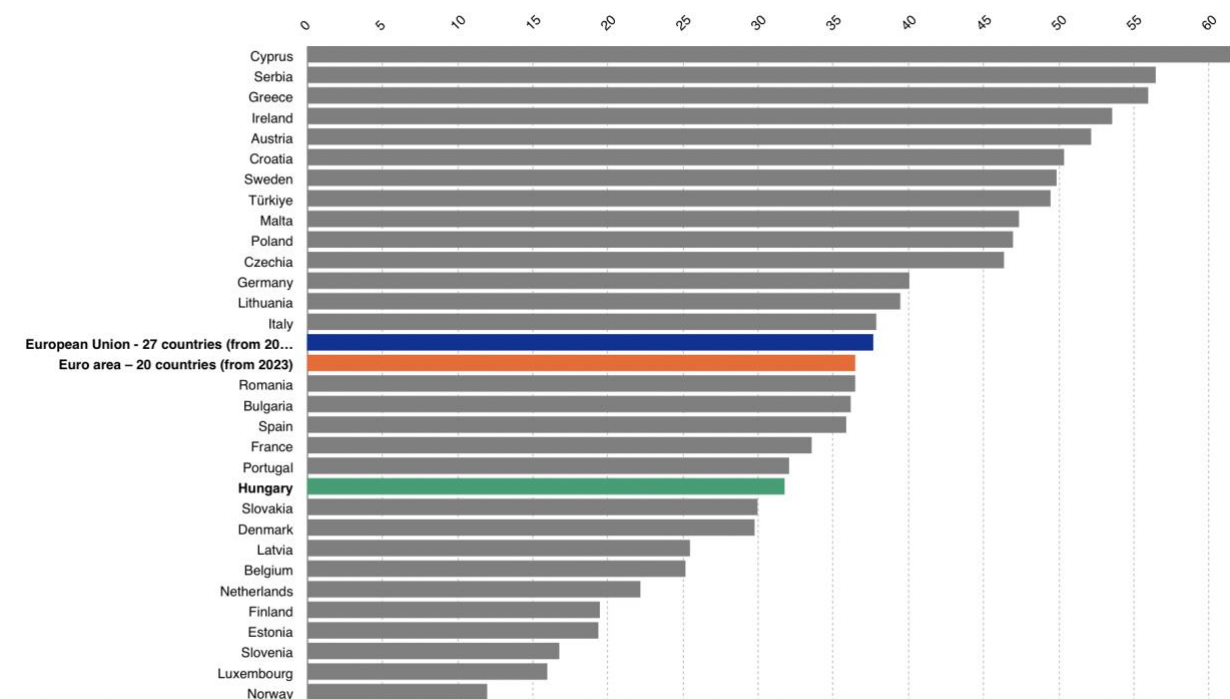
McCarty (2012a) gives account for languages being classified as favourable or futile based on the economic dominance or cultural prestige a society associates them with. This trend is giving a privileged status to national or international languages. At the same time, some countries put great effort into making multiple languages accessible for learners. Sweden holds out educational support in 100 languages. Whilst Japan can almost solely provide support in the native language. This proves that wealth by itself is not responsible for deciding on such matters, but a nation’s chief conceptions are.

Even in the last century, bilinguals were already outnumbering monolinguals due to globalization and increased population movement, resulting in more and more contact between cultures (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Yet, where monolingualism is viewed as the norm, it is still popular in the United States and England, and bilingualism can be assumed to be odd or inferior (Baker, 2011). We also have our historical background to blame for such approach. “To speak an inferior language was a sign of inferiority and uneducatedness and bilingualism was seen as a transitional stage on the way to civilisation”. (Miller, 2014, p. 3). Also, many citizens have solely single-language competence even in officially bilingual or multilingual countries (Edwards, 2004). Be that as it may, during the past ten years especially, there has been an increase in the value of acquiring languages. The main reasons behind this tendency are global, national, and local. Moreover, the economic, educational, and personal benefits are also strong motives (Genesee, 2014). Figure 2 represents countries of Europe where residents between the

age of 18 and 64 years self-reported that they know one foreign language in 2022. According to the data the 27 countries of the European Union know one foreign language in 37.7% and 20 countries of the Euro area know one foreign language in 36.5%. Küçükler's (2018) research proved that bilingual as well as monoglot individuals nowadays, tend to agree that knowing more than one language is beneficial. The bilingual might have a wider variety of job opportunities and has an advantage in comparison to the fellow monolingual if otherwise the two share the same qualifications. "Language — any language — is a window to the world." (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013, para. 35)

Figure 2

One foreign language known (self-reported) from 18 to 64 years in Europe



Note. The graph was created to demonstrate European countries where adults self-reported that they know one foreign language in 2022. From "Number of foreign languages known (self-reported) by age", by Eurostat, 2024, January 16.

1.2.3 Who is bilingual?

For in this dissertation individual bilingualism, or as Hamers and Blanc came up with the name, ‘bilinguality’ (cited in Butler & Hakuta, 2004), is the research’s core, I shall continue with the focus mostly shifting toward that direction. According to Baker (2011) “If a person is asked whether he or she speaks two or more languages, the question is ambiguous.” (p. 3). It comes down to language ability and language use. Maybe someone is using one language but only for conversational purposes, the other person uses two languages frequently although the competence in the two greatly differs. Ability and use of language can also be referred to as the distinction between degree and function.

Jim Cummins (1979) cites Oller’s approach who questioned whether there is a global factor of language proficiency, as mostly it is based on institutionalized measures of language skills, such as reading comprehension and vocabulary or oral and written cloze examination, perhaps dictation. Functional language skills and communicative competence carry such sociolinguistic aspects which make it impossible to reduce the matter into global proficiency extent. Bialystok (2011) raises the question: Which features of a language are the most substantial anyway? Speakers tend to be evaluated based on a holistic impression, even so, being meaningful, forthright, and grammatically correct, along with using an adequate pronunciation are often the most judged elements.

There is a pressing need to examine some aspects and define some concepts before we find ourselves deep in the unique world of bilingualism. A common abbreviation used to separate between the two languages of a speaker are L1 and L2. It goes without saying that L1 refers to the language the individual first imbibed and L2’s acquirement happened later (Kovács & Trentinné, 2016). Another two crucial terms are minority and majority language. Minority language is a language not used broadly by a certain group or community. Majority language, on the other hand, is the language likely to be used by the community where one resides and is likely to be used in the educational or work environment (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).

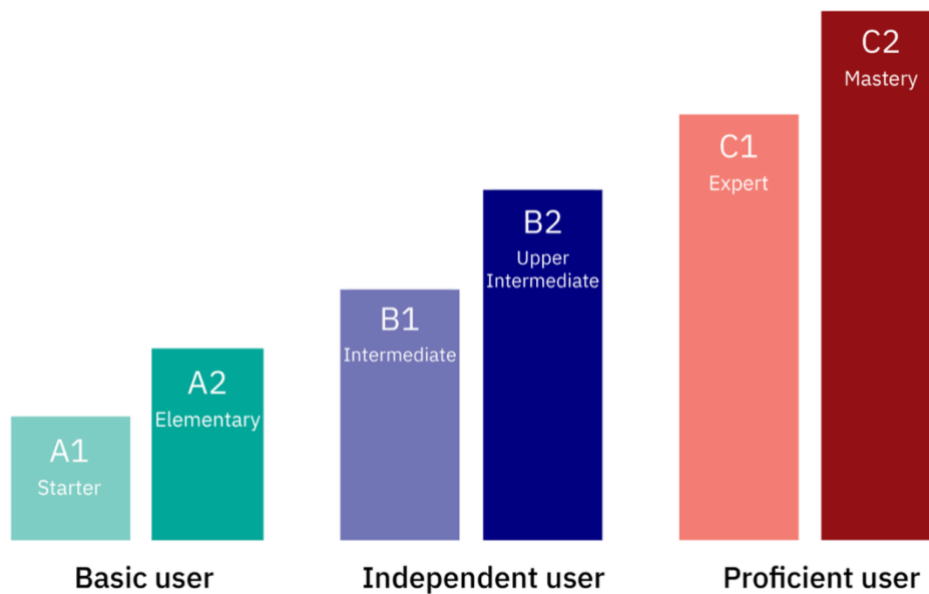
Another fundamental factor is the question of fluency. How much and what quality language promotes someone to be fluent? Grading someone as bilingual is somewhat of a hard task as there is no agreed-upon “amount” of language required for one to qualify as a “knower” of the L2. (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). There is a general presumption that it is impossible for a bilingual

to be evenly competent in both languages (Bialystok, 2011). Hamers & Blanc (2000) cite various opinions concerning fluency. According to Bloomfield, those who speak their second language as excellent as the native speakers do, are bilingual. This viewpoint is quite strict, and also engages in the hardship of operationalizing “native-like fluencies”. On the contrary, Macnamara stated that a bilingual is someone who even has minimal competence in one of the four language skills, those being: listening comprehension, reading, writing, and speaking; in a language other than the individual’s mother tongue. Mohanty emphasised meeting the demands of communication between members of a bilingual group or any other speaker of two or both languages, ergo, he used the social-communitive dimension to explore the matter. Titone’s viewpoint on the matter is also an honourable mention: his focus was on whether the person is following their second language’s structure and concepts instead of rephrasing their first language. Titone’s understanding resembles Weinreich’s thoughts regarding the method of producing language, which will be explained soon.

Butler & Hakuta (2004) provide Haugen’s view from 1953, saying that those who are bilingual are fluent in their mother tongue and can also create thorough meaningful utterances using another language. Several researchers tend to support this extended view of bilinguals. British Council (2015) differentiates fluency according to the different stages of learning a language. This way elementary, intermediate, and advanced fluency are distinguished. Using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), European languages are broken down into 6 stages. These are A1, A2 (the elementary levels), B1, B2 (the intermediate levels), and C1, C2 (the advanced levels) (see Figure 3). Notwithstanding, the progress that is needed to advance further on these levels is not the same. It gets more difficult at each level and requires more effort.

Figure 3

CEFR levels



Note. The chart exhibits CEFR language levels. From “How to get a higher CEFR score?”, by Transcom, 2023, April 6.

1.3 Dimensions of bilingualism

1.3.1 How the phenomenon of bilingualism shall be approached

Lambert (2000) emphasizes “Few think about bilingualism in an integrated, interdisciplinary manner.” (p. xi). It is essential to understand that based on the locality, where it is presented, the character of bilingualism is not the same (Arsenian, 1937). It is a complex and multi-layered system defined by social, cognitive, linguistic, and developmental elements (Butler & Hakuta, 2004). “Research on bilingualism probably fails to reflect its diverse reality.” (Bialystok, 2001, p. 9). There are examples from the past when only the linguistic dimension was taken into account. That led towards to deficient or inaccurate interpretations, for this reason, there are multiple aspects and criteria which shall be used to provide a thorough and firm explanation for the phenomenon (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Arsenian (1937) notes five conditions, which can give an objective statement regarding bilingualism. These were the degree of bilingualism, the degree of similarity between the two languages, age, learning method, and also the language situation’s affective tone. Almost 100 years later, Baker (2011) listed the following dimensions to use when exploring the superstructure: ability, use, balance of the two languages, age,

development, culture, contexts, and circumstance. Hamers and Blanc (2000) made their own catalogue of relevant dimensions. They listed relative competence, cognitive organisation, age of acquisition, exogeneity, social cultural status, and cultural identity. It is easy to see that these authors' views consist of multiple shared understandings. I intend to unfold these along those fields where their opinions might not match.

1.3.2 Cognitive organisation

Weinreich's view on the phenomenon (cited in Butler & Hakuta, 2004; Mabuto, 2017) resembles with what Hamers and Blanc (2000) write under the 'cognitive organization' distinction, referring to Ervin's and Osgood's theory. Weinreich's findings are based on how one organizes the linguistic codes originating from different languages (Butler & Hakuta, 2004). Weinreich (cited in Mabuto, 2017) distinguished compound, coordinate, and subordinate distinctions. According to this approach, compound bilinguals possess one merged "tank" to store their linguistic knowledge from L1 and L2. This way the speaker is equally fluent in both languages as the two languages are fused together. L2 is a simple alternative channel originating from the same underlying system as the L1. On the contrary, the coordinate form maintains two separate "tanks", meaning the switch between the two languages does not come so naturally, they are stored as independent communication systems. Finally, subordinate bilinguals understand their second language through their mother tongue. Just like compound bilinguals, subordinate bilinguals own only one "tank" with a single set of meaning unit along with two sets of sound images. As the L2 exists as a rough translation of the L1, the subordinate bilingual is only able to draw from the first language units, while identifying the sound images of the second language.

Hamers & Blanc (2000) cite Ervin and Osgood, who introduced their view just one year later than Weinreich. They only separated compound and coordinate language systems, moreover, they suspected a strong relation between the context of the acquisition, along with age, and which semantic organization might develop in the bilingual's brain. "It must be stressed that this distinction is not absolute" (p. 27), it is possible for an individual that while some concepts might prevail as coordinate, other concepts are compound with all their might. Also, regardless of these distinctions, the brain operates in such a way that it stores and learns languages using the same region, meaning, overlaps of connections between translations cannot be altogether avoided (Blanco, 2021a). When Jim Cummins (1979) explored Oller's 'global language

proficiency' argument, he introduced his own term, 'cognitive/academic language proficiency' (CALP), so to be able to specify those dimensions of language proficiency that have a strong relation with cognitive and academic skills. Explaining the interdependence between the L1 and L2 from the academic and cognitive perspective, he states that both L1 and L2 CALP are tokens of the same fundamental dimension. He later adds that similar languages promote more overlapping when processed.

1.3.3 Ability

Only Baker (2011) explores this dimension. He states that actively speaking and writing in both languages means having a 'productive competence', while there are those who have a receptive ability and as they can comprehend and read in a certain language, they are passive bilinguals. For some, the two or more languages can be well-developed, others can still be in the early stage of acquiring the second language (emerging bilinguals). Ability is a wide spectrum, which is based on dominance and development and bilinguals can be found at every extent of it.

1.3.4 Balance and relative competence

Butler & Hakuta (2004) refers to Paul and Lamber who introduced the terms of balanced and dominant (unbalanced) bilinguals, meaning that they categorized by competence. When one's proficiency in the L1 and L2 are similar, he or she classifies as a balanced bilingual, whereas when the proficiency is higher in one language in comparison to the other (ones) the said individual is graded as a dominant bilingual.

Balanced bilinguality should not be confused with a very high degree of competence in the two languages; it is rather a question of a state of equilibrium reached by the levels of competence attained in the two languages as compared to monolingual competence. (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, p. 27).

It is important to bear in mind that language has multiple domains and functions. Each person has their own dominance configuration, meaning that balance or dominance is not equally shared with all fragments of language (Hamers & Blanc, 2000) also, its state is not permanent, it can alter as time passes (Baker, 2011).

1.3.5 Age

Maybe one of the easiest ways is to distinguish by the time people start to acquire the new language. It is crucial to see the difference between childhood, adolescence, and adult bilinguality. When it comes to childhood bilinguality what happens is that the child acquires

languages while the developmental elements are still immature, thus the experience of acquiring more languages at the same time might have some sort of impact on the child's development (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Some are born into a family/community where they are surrounded by more than one language simultaneously from infancy. For this reason, they are called simultaneous bilinguals (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Storie, 2022). In this case, we are talking about two mother tongues, accordingly, the previously discussed L1 and L2 are not fitting terms, therefore the certain languages are referred to as L_A and L_B (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Those who are raised in a monolingual family and learn another language later in life, after about three of age, are declared consecutive or sequential bilinguals (Baker, 2011; Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). According to Hamers & Blanc (2000), the significant difference between simultaneous and consecutive bilinguals is form-function mapping: while for the first group, two forms are attached to one function, for the members of the second category simple mapping takes place before learning the new languages, as the functions already exist.

1.3.6 Use

Baker (2011) points out that in numerous cases each language has their purpose in a person's life. While a child might use a language in school, it is possible that they use a different one in their home/street/when communicating online. The same may apply to the adult who uses a different language at work in comparison to other settings of their life. The domains (contexts) are diverse.

1.3.7 Exogeneity and context

Using the terms exogenous or endogenous bilingualism depends on whether both languages are used in a social environment for an individual. Endogenous languages might be used in the institutionalised environment, while also being a child's mother tongue. Contrarily, an exogenous language is solely used in official, institutionalised environment, meaning it has no speech community in the political essence to use it in an official manner. For instance, exogenous languages in Central, East, and West Africa are English and French. A Benin child attend school exclusively in French, whilst speaking Fon at their household. This results in the development of exogenous bilinguality in French and Fon (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Exogenous and endogenous bilingualism can also occur in those cases where an absence arises for the bilingual's first language. Usually, this is a possibility for immigrants (for example those who

immigrate to the United States or United Kingdom). The politics of a country have strong influence on the matter. Their decision can be subtractive: replacing the original language with the language spoken by the majority (English taking Spanish's place in the United States). Other cases may be additive, meaning that the second language means no harm to the person's native language, hence these speakers are called prestigious or elite bilinguals (Baker, 2011).

1.3.8 Circumstance

It is crucial to be able to separate elective and circumstantial bilinguals, as it provides an obvious view of the differences of power, politics, prestige, and status. Elective bilingualism is somewhat of an elite choice. Most of the time these people come from majority language groups and add a second language to their repertoire, for example, in the classroom. Learning a new language means no harm to their first language. On the other hand, circumstantial bilinguals are compelled to learn another language due to their circumstances (immigrants are an excellent example of this subtype). To be a functional member of the society they have to acquire the majority language, and as they are mostly expected to communicate in the L2, their mother tongue may be endangered by being replaced with the L2. This is a subtractive context (Baker, 2011).

1.3.9 Development

When learning a new language, for many the mother tongue is already in well-developed condition. If a second language is in a progressive state it is referred to as ascendant bilingualism (Baker, 2011). Additionally, there are those who store knowledge of (a) language(s), although do not put it/them to use anymore (Butler & Hakuta, 2004). This means that the language is decreasing which can lead to limited or permanent language attrition (Baker, 2011). These individuals are referred to as dormant (Butler & Hakuta, 2004) or recessive bilinguals (Baker, 2011).

1.3.10 Social cultural status

Hamers & Blanc (2000) take down how the community's approach towards the two represented languages is a crucial factor when it comes to the child's bilinguality. We are talking about additive bilingualism when both languages are treated with equal value, in consequence, the child shall experience the full benefit of bilingualism, resulting in a higher level of excellence of cognitive flexibility in comparison to the monolingual peers. Yet, when the mother tongue

is endangered by being graded not so significant, it has a contra-productive effect on the child's cognitive development, it may cause delays so extreme that the bilingual child is not able to make up for the disadvantage they have compared to a monolingual equal.

1.3.11 Culture and cultural identity

When discussing bilingualism, the topic of culture cannot be left unmentioned, as languages are essential parts of a person's identity, just as much as they are roots of each culture. If the individual feels positively towards both cultures and thinks of them as their own (the culture which uses the same languages as what the individual speaks) then the person is not only bilingual but also bicultural (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Bicultural competence consists of being able to express biculturalism with confidence; possessing attitudes and feelings towards certain cultures; displaying empathy and awareness; having knowledge of the language cultures; and showing culturally applicable behavior (Baker, 2011). Balanced bilinguality and balanced biculturalism have a possibility of coexisting, although one of them being present does not mean the presence of the other. One can be fluent in more than one language but remain monocultural (Hamers & Blanc, 2000), this is quite likely for someone who is graduating in a foreign language (Baker, 2011). One can be bilingual and neglect their mother tongue's culture while integrating the second language's culture. In this case, we are talking about an L2-acculturated bilingual. Furthermore, it might happen that the person does not identify with their original culture anymore and does not identify with the new language's culture either. This results in the bilingual becoming deculturated and socially alienated (Hamers & Blanc, 2000).

1.4 Educational bilingualism

1.4.1 Historical background

As the 21st century started approaching the educational methods and values underwent a serious reconstruction. A new ideology started taking shape, in which education belongs to the mass population, where the focus is on whether the material is useful and provides social, economic, and individual benefit, through active learning. In addition, that learning being centered around the learners. The pupils shall leave the schools armed with the necessary tools for a future yet to come. This vision allowed bilingual schooling systems to appear and become a more and more popular choice for parents (Kovács & Trentinné, 2016). Before delving into these educational programs, it is beneficial the overview the brief historical background regarding the matter.

Some believe passionately that use of any language other than English in the U.S. creates divisiveness; others believe that freedom to speak whatever language one chooses is a fundamental human right. Yet others feel that other languages in education are a luxury that cannot be afforded in difficult economic times. (Roberts, 1995, p. 369)

Porter (2017) shares her personal story about being a language minority child in the United States school system. According to her, in the 1960s it became clear that language minority children in her school were receiving inadequate education. This was followed by the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) revolutionary approach. It assigned native language instructions to English lessons. The named act was valued and acknowledged as a necessarily made effort to somewhat right the infamy situation. It is well-documented how insensibly language minority children were treated. Being labeled mentally retarded because of using English with limits; receiving punishments, verbal and physical, for using native language in the school; in some cases, student's needs were neglected to such an extent that they ended up quitting the institution. As a result, several court decisions, federal and state laws, and regulatory acts were passed to better the language minority children's educational opportunities. The operation of bilingual education had become a widely argued topic and having no evidence which would support that it is effective, the final decision was that solely native-language-based bilingual education shall be allowed.

What about Europe? Kovács & Trentinné (2016) summarize the main proceedings. During the end of the 19th century, some secondary institutions started to integrate modern languages into their curricula. Still, those who desired to thoroughly learn a language could only possibly do so, outside of a school's walls. Knowing modern foreign languages was not thought of as a virtue. Having said that, educational knowledge and language skills were treated as separate units. Just when some sort of interest started to develop toward linguistic diversification, the world wars took place. During this period, for a person to use a language other than the state's official one was endangering. Multilingual families hid their foreign origins and raised their children monolingually. Even after the political situation's alleviation, to be able to learn a 'Western' language one had to go to extra lengths, since general education could not fulfill such demand. McCarty (2012a) notes that, to this day, government policies have determining impact on which languages can be used in the schooling system.

1.4.2 Institutionalised bilingualism

During the 20th century, educationists were facing multiple questions regarding if the results of educational bilingualism are detrimental, and if the education is bilingual, then how should it be integrated and balanced. Furthermore, issues regarding when a child should learn a second language and with what methods. As for these concerns, in 1928 the international conference on bilingualism requested research on the problems of bilingualism (Arsenian, 1937). Still, in 1953 UNESCO stated that it is axiomatic that the child's mother tongue is the best medium for teaching (James Cummins, 1979). It should be noted that language is a peculiar area of knowledge. It certainly varies from other studies, therefore from school subjects as well. It is dependent on society's nature, moreover, has a practical character, it needs to be used in communication so as to be known (Kovács & Trentinné, 2016).

“Some groups are intent on rapid assimilation; others are more concerned with holding on to their language and traditions; all look to the schools as the agency that will support and execute their priorities.” (Porter, 2017, p. 5). Needs and expectations diverge, for this reason, multiple bilingual education types have been established. McCarty (2012a) cites Baker's ten separate aims for bilingual education: assimilating to the mainstream of society; creating a unified multilingual society; enabling people to communicate with the outside world; aiding status and employment by providing marketable language skills; preserving religious and ethnic identity; mediating and reconciling between diverse political and linguistic communities; spreading colonial language use; strengthening elite collectives and preserving their position in society; providing equal lawful status to languages which might have an unequal status in daily life; expanding the awareness of culture and language.

In 1937, Arsenian was thinking in the following way:

Further findings in future experimental investigations of the problems of bilingualism are likely to lead to formulations of important educational policies in regard to the optimum time or methods for the acquisition of languages, to the encouragement or discouragement of bilingualism in countries where people speaking different languages live together, to the development of methods for greater harmony and co-operation between language groups in the interest of a richer culture and civilization. (p. 154)

His predictions were certainly relevant, as Küçükler (2018) notes how several researchers applaud bilingual education. Challenges, however, remain. These can possibly be circumstantial like limited applications, lack of local support or lack of developed curricula. On the other hand, Amodeo & Arnberg (1983) bring attention to the fact that the mentioned

challenges can also be methodological. There is still disagreement regarding what role should two languages play in a child's early development. Yet, when academic performance, cognitive and language development, and self-concept are considered, the truth unfolds, which is that the state of the art in research methodology triggers the inconsistency or disagreement, not the quality of bilingual education. In addition, Alvarado-Mata (2016) signifies that the same bilingual educational program, which produces marvelous outcomes in one country might prove to be unsuccessful in a different corner of the world.

McCarty (2012b) divides bilingual institutes into two main groups: whether the participants acquire a strong or a weak form of bilingualism. The key difference is conducting reading and writing in both languages, which leads to biliteracy. One of the successful programs is Immersion, originating from a bilingual nation, Canada. Its effectiveness lies in using a different language from the majority language, but one which has cultural prestige, economic value, and a high status. Since it shows confirmed academic advancement, numerous other countries implemented its program, and it keeps on operating effectively. Two-Way or Dual Language has similarities with immersion, nevertheless, they aim to accept as many language minority as language majority children. Their aspiration is that the children learn from each other as both represented languages are equally valued. The final strong form is named Mainstream Bilingual. In such program, certain content of the curriculum is provided via the student's second language. In Europe, this program is regularly referred to as Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

1.5 The bilingual child

1.5.1 Monolingual versus bilingual child

If a child is exposed to two languages in 10-25% then they can be declared as bilingual. Yet, such exposure does not ensure functional bilingualism (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). Butler and Hakuta (2004) note that until the early 1960s, psychometric studies mainly showed negative correlations between bilingualism and intelligence. Bilingualism has been viewed as harmful for children. Arsenian (1937) quotes several academics who gave voice to their opinions, stating how untoward bilingualism is. Some found it dangerous to expose a child to a new language before they reached a certain level of their mother tongue. According to Ziegler (cited in Arsenian, 1937), speaking two languages equals being at home in neither.

Laurie (cited in Arsenian, 1937) was not hesitant to speak ill of bilingualism either. He thought that being adept in a foreign tongue almost counted as a misfortune. “If it were possible for a child or boy to live in two languages at once equally well, so much worse for him. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby be doubled, but halved.” (p. 25). Paradis, Genesee, and Crago (cited in Genesee, 2014) called this the ‘limited capacity theory’, according to which a child being exposed to two languages provides way too big of a challenge for them and therefore leads to deviant patterns or delay in the development of languages or possibly even fragmentary competence.

I have been involved daily with the consequences of applying some of the theories advanced in recent years to improve the education of children whose English is so limited as to make their schooling ineffective.

I am one of these children. I sat in the back of the classroom in the Elliott Street School, Newark, New Jersey, at age six, an immigrant child, not understanding a word being said by the teacher or other students. I experienced the pain and frustration of struggling to learn a second language unassisted and the difficulty of being accepted by my peers in an American classroom. (Porter, 2017, p. 2).

Throughout history, bilinguals were associated with handicaps (James Cummins, 1979; Miller, 2014) – for instance, left-handedness, stuttering, and schizophrenia (Miller, 2014) – and received several degrading labels such as mentally confused (James Cummins, 1979) or retarded (Porter, 2017). Some pediatricians still forewarn parents against exposure to two languages (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013) and some children still experience the stigma rubbing off on them. In the United States, children can still be categorized as having Limited English Proficiency (LEP) (McCarty, 2012b) – children of language minority and immigrant families have been officially federally categorized as such –, while in Europe the term ‘semilingual’ – an unfortunate phrase referring to having low cognitive and academic skills in the L2 (Jim Cummins, 1979) – has been used for those who are not proficient in both languages (Baker, 2011). McCarty (2012b) reveals how being considered as having low intelligence based on second language test results also still may occur today.

Bilingual children have been compared to their monolingual peers for a long time (Genesee, 2014; Jürgen, 2004) for instance in terms of whether they are able to produce the same ‘quality’ language (Jürgen, 2004) or have the same size of vocabulary (Genesee, 2014). This attitude, which does not lack a political overtone (Baker, 2011) is at fault at its core as such comparison

suggests that monolingualism is the norm. It is vital to produce a remedial approach to the monolingual versus bilingual child issue where the bilingual child is not set against the monolingual peer through an idealized concept of two separate linguistic systems co-existing within the child who shall behave in every situation in an adequate and respectful manner just like the relative monolingual (Jürgen, 2004). Studying the differences between monolingual and bilingual children is still common, although the aim is usually to examine cognitive control (Morton & Harper, 2007), such as attention (Hernández & Sebastián-Gallés, 2008) or processing efficiency (Yang, Yang, & Lust, 2011).

Misconceptions, judgements, impossible expectations shall be all thrown aside; a bilingual is not a pair of monolinguals in one body (Baker, 2011; Jürgen, 2004). Mastering a language can put pressure on any individual. The pronunciation, the accuracy and facility of expression, the rapidity and comprehension of reading – chances are high one is likely to experience undesired emotional consequences of being bilingual (Arsenian, 1937). “A bilingual is a complete linguistic entity, an integrated whole.” (Baker, 2011, p. 12). Küçükler’s (2018) modernised research showed that bilinguals and monolinguals share such an opinion that there are, in fact, benefits of being bilingual. As Baker (2011) explains, they use their different languages in different settings, social situations, with different partners, for this reason, the skills and abilities they possess reflect on the needs and preferences of those social contexts where they interact with others. This proposes that a bilingual can be stronger in a different domain of each language. Furthermore, Jürgen (2004) adds that knowledge of each language can be stimulated quite or not so strongly.

1.5.2 Challenges and advantages

Since assessment methods were mostly customized for the monocultural and monolingual population they lost their accuracy when tried to be applied to notably different linguistic and cultural background children. The melting-pot ideology pinpointed the issue at the ‘bilingual’ or the ‘immigrant’, as it is them who fail to become effective monolingual speakers. The pluralistic view shall respect diversity and aim to adjust the materials and theories to fit the subjects (Miller, 2014).

Bilingualism’s appearance and form are disparate everywhere (Arsenian, 1937). Some communities expect bilingualism. The home and school languages lock the children in such a

circumstance that they have no choice but to acquire two languages. Some of these cases of bilingualism are the heritage of colonialism (Bialystok, 2001). Not to mention, that many times where bilingualism was tolerated, it was frequently demanded to be a native-like and identical control of the two languages (Miller, 2014).

Children can become bilingual under a great variety of circumstances. From peer groups, childcare workers, grandparents, and parents –these distinct circumstances can be influential for the bilingual child's proficiency. There are crucial factors the child's proficiency is dependent on (Nicoladis & Genesee, 1997). A key variant, which was not controlled properly during early research (Morton & Harper, 2007), is the socio-economic status of the family. Numerous studies suggested that while middle-class children from the language majority groups became functional bilinguals and had academic achievements, several language minority children showed poor academic achievements, along with deficient control of both the L1 and L2 (James Cummins, 1979). Other influential components are the community support for bilingualism, the history of contact between the two languages and language groups, and the child's feelings of identity with the languages and the source of the two languages (optimally a source which values different languages and views them as useful). Research has shown a direct association between accepting home environment and second-language achievement (Gardner, 1968).

Lagging behind is not uncommon for those who acquire a second language, especially in the case of children. This tendency, however, is usually followed by taking over those who they were behind (Küçükler, 2018). "The problem should be studied and dealt with in each case within the scope of conditions present in a bilingual situation." (Arsenian, 1937, p. 154). Speech-language pathologists must have a full comprehension of a bilingual child's individual language learning circumstance and history, so they have a clear understanding of the child's language development (Nicoladis & Genesee, 1997). Still, receiving quality training regarding the learning needs of a bilingual child is a luxury few can have access to, which occasionally results in misdiagnosing bilingual children as having disordered or delayed language (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).

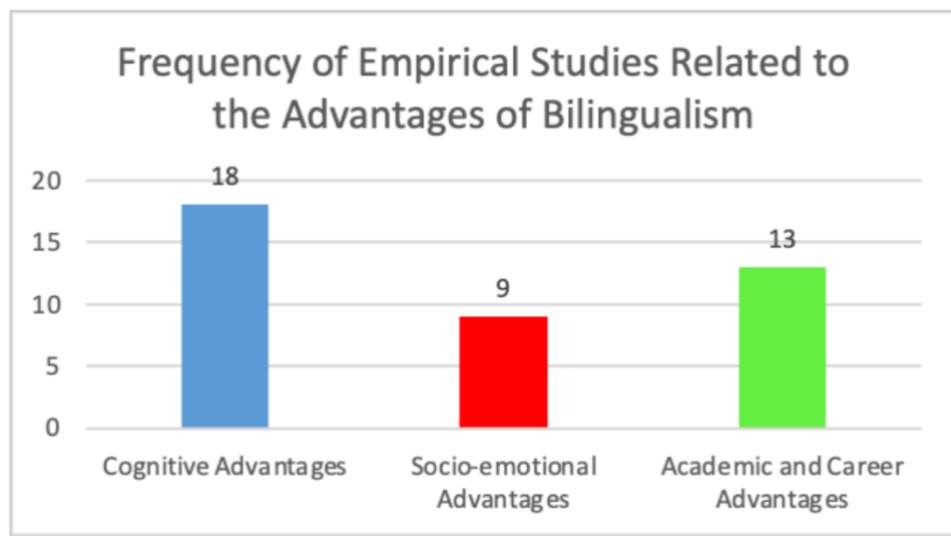
According to Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams (2013), there is a great number of evidence today which shows that the first spoken words occur at the same time for a bilingual (even for those who learn a spoken and a sign language at the same time) child as for a monolingual one.

Moreover, simultaneous bilinguals have the same size or bigger vocabulary than their monolingual peers when their conceptual vocabulary is viewed, meaning both of their languages' vocabulary combined (see also in Genesee, 2014). Language milestones may be delayed in some bilinguals' case, but it is understandable, as their brain has twofold the workload (Storied, 2022). Genesee's (2014) study proved how even bilingual children with language impairment show patterns of grammatical progress, which are very much alike to monolingual children's, who have impairment. Concluding these findings, the evidence is convincing that learning two languages at the same time does not mean greater challenge for the neurocognitive system than learning only one.

Not only is it not troubling, but research has proven that it provides metalinguistic awareness, along with a so-called 'cognitive flexibility' (Schinke-Llano, 1989). Studying young bilinguals proved that these children are more sensitive toward certain characteristics of communication, for instance, the tone of voice. Pre-schoolers demonstrated that they have better understanding of other children in terms of intentions, perspectives, desires, and thoughts in comparison to the same-aged monolinguals. The same tendency was seen in the case of altering between activities and inhibiting responses learned prior, along with certain aspects of memory. Undergoing early training in music also leads to such cognitive advantage which demonstrates how various early exposure and experience can develop cognitive advancement (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). When examining attentional networks of orienting, alerting, and executive control, bilinguals showed a reduced switching cost between different forms of trials in comparison to monolinguals (Hernández & Sebastián-Gallés, 2008). Similarly, a study carried out with four different groups of 4-year-olds – monolingual Americans, monolingual Koreans living in the United States, monolingual Koreans living in Korea, and bilingual Koreans living in the United States – concluded that bilinguals outperform all their monolingual peers in terms of executing control for conflict resolution. They processed information faster and provided more accurate responses (Yang, Yang & Lust, 2011). Figure 4 illustrates the division of empirical studies regarding the advantages of bilingualism.

Figure 4

Frequency of Empirical Studies Related to the Advantages of Bilingualism



Note. The chart provides a visual demonstration of the division of empirical studies concerning the advantages of bilingualism. From “Investigating the advantages of bilingualism: Multidimensional research findings”, by Dewi et al., 2021, December.

Küçükler (2018) mentions another abstract cognitive ability: being open-minded. Being able to examine issues from different dimensions. According to Hoover (cited in Küçükler, 2018) the greater cognitive ability is attributed to overcoming the challenge of acquiring a second language. All these findings lead back to how bilingualism can alter the brain’s organization by executive function. Even when the focus is on the language being used at the moment, the other language is being inhibited (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Storied, 2022). This function promotes better academic skills and helps slowing down the deterioration of the aged brain, thus delaying diseases such as Alzheimer’s or dementia (Blanco, 2021b; Storied, 2022).

1.5.3 Language learning child versus adult

Even casual observations can prove: children show a tendency to readily learn a new language and easily assimilating to their native-born peers in terms of acquiring the language. Per contra, adults face hardships when mastering a new language and do not ever end up altogether sounding like native speakers (Hoff, 2005). “There may not be a sharp turn for the worse at

any point in development, but there is an incremental decline in language learning abilities with age.” (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013, para. 23)

Oyama’s (cited in Jim Cummins, 1979) study about Italian immigrants showed a strong relation between the age of arrival to the United States and the ability to speak English with a less heavy foreign accent (see also in Hoff, 2005). Asher’s and García’s (1969) examination concerning Cuban children’s English pronunciation pointed in the same direction. Hoff (2005) explored the age-of-exposure issue from a grammatical perspective as well. She cites a study that showed that those immigrants who arrived in the United States between the ages of 3 and 7 became undistinguishable from the natives. Those who immigrated aged between 8 and 15 performed less adequately than their American peers but showed such a proportionality that the younger they arrived the more native-like competence they acquired. Subjects aged 17 did not do better on the test in comparison to those who were 30 years of age. Coppieters (cited in Hoff, 2005) provides additional evidence for the age-of-arrival effect. He studied cases of native speakers versus second language speakers and found that natives to outperform L2 speakers even if their work demands a great amount of writing in their second language (authors, professors). On the contrary, Ramsey’s and Wright’s findings (cited in Jim Cummins, 1979) suggest that the length of residence is more influential than the age when exposed to the L2. Moreover, Asher’s & García’s (1969) research has proven that older children are also able to achieve exceptional pronunciation, indicating how not only biology is responsible for such aspects.

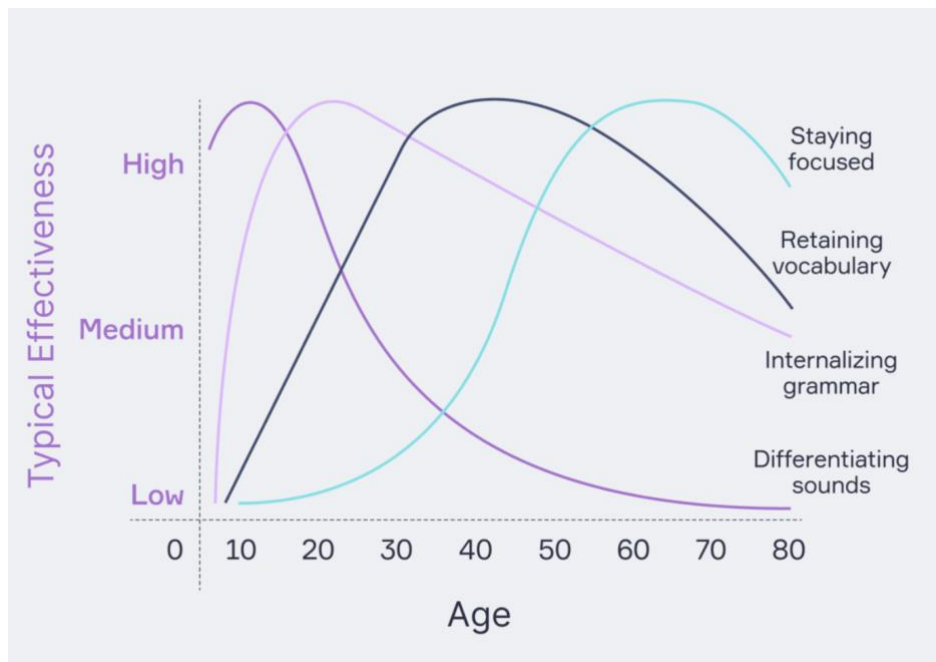
Multiple times motor skills are ‘blamed for’ the difficulties adults may face when learning a new language. Speaking different languages requires different movements of the lips, mouth, and tongue, which may be harder to adapt to as a late learner. The brain is also ‘at fault’ as evidence shows that the tuning of the perception of speech sounds, and differentiating between these sounds, starts in infancy. Especially between the sounds of the languages we learn at the time (Hoff, 2005). The whole spectrum of phonemes is perceived by an infant under 6 months. Storied (2022) refers to this occurrence as perceptual narrowing. The price to pay for it is losing the ability to detect sounds that do not matter during that time. The main difficulty for adult learners might be based at how the brain operates in various ways through various stages in life (Hoff, 2005). Ausubel (1964) explains how a child’s intellectual capacities are not as differentiated along specific lines, they tend to be venturesome and flexible when setting new learning tasks in motion. According to Jim Cummins (1979), older learners have the advantage when it comes to mastering the morphology and syntax of the L2, while children have the high

ground in the fields of accent and oral fluency. The brain shows changes in effectiveness concerning distinct factors as age progresses (see Figure 5).

The key difference between a language-learning child and an adult is not biological only (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Hoff, 2005). For an adult learner to reach the level of fluency might mean a challenge, while learning a language from an early age can result in being more confident when using that language later in life (Küçükler, 2018). What is more, the child tends to be less self-conscious when it comes to attempting to speak a new language. For them, a second language might be essential for communication, school progress, and establishing relationships with peers (Ausubel, 1964). Also, environmental factors tend to be more likely support language learning during the early years of life (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). Most of the time adults have different opportunities, along with diverse attitudes towards the new language (Hoff, 2005). Blanco (2021b) mentions, however, that today's technology helps provide more language learning options for adults. She suggests trying to reach 'communication goals' without chasing the faintly defined concept of fluency. Even a few months of learning a new language shows changes in the brains of adult learners, showing processing patterns like the ones native speakers have. After 12 months, cognitive adaptations improved, the ones, which bilinguals use when successfully switching between languages.

Figure 5

Changes in Brain Effectiveness as Age Progresses



Note. The graph was created to give a summary of how the brain shows different effectiveness as age progresses. From “How learning a language changes depending on your age”, by Fitzpatrick, J., 2022, October 26, Lingvist.

1.5.4 Optimal age

Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams (2013) enunciate how everyday observations and systematic studies all led to (Hoff, 2005) the research of second language acquisition and bilingualism mingling at the same point: the earlier the better (see also in Hoff, 2005). For all that, by “earlier” not everyone means birth. According to Schinke-Llano (1989), some support sequential acquisition, which means starting second language exposure after the child has learned their mother tongue only for a decent time. This raises the question: how much time does the first language require to anchor? According to McLaughlin (cited in Schinke-Llano, 1989), the answer is three years. It tends to be believed by many that youthful children are competent and successful language learners, therefore they are often expected to acquire a second language smoothly and at a fast pace and achieve a native-like competence, mostly by

being naturally exposed to the target language. This logic is rooted in the critical period hypothesis (Genesee, 2014). Hoff (2005) gives a thorough explanation for the hypothesis. It puts age in command of a successful native-like competence when it comes to the L2. The hypothesis says that language acquisition must take place during a biologically fixed period if it is to take place at all. Yet, younger age being more suitable does not automatically approve the axiom. Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams (2013) draw attention to the fact that researchers argue whether a time frame as such exists at all and when it takes place. According to some, the period is thought to take place between birth and the age of 5, or in fact, until 15. Genesee (2014) states that according to others, it is until 12-13 years of age.

Even native language is being continuously learned throughout life. Picking up new possible combinations of words and new vocabulary can be a daily occurrence for diligent readers. One should not consider learning an additional language any differently (Fitzpatrick, 2022). Unmistakably, an adult or an older child does not have the same language learning environment as an infant or toddler who is exposed to the new language(s) joyfully and who has intimate interactions with a native speaker. Instead of this personal altogether discovery of a language, one finds themselves sitting in a classroom where the grammar is described, and words are defined. It goes without saying that the latter-mentioned circumstance is not nearly as powerful as the first one (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). Brains do operate differently with age, although new research has proven that the brain is much more flexible and adaptive than previously reckoned, accordingly, starting to learn a new language is not ever too early or too late. The cultural and social factors as well as cognitive and health advantages benefit all language learners, regardless of age (Blanco, 2021b).

1.5.5 Raising bilingual children

All children's parents tend to be concerned about one or two matters regarding their children. Bilingual children's parents are no different. There have always been questions, and it is most likely that there are going to be questions (see in Amodeo & Arnberg, 1983; Bialystok, 2011; Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Nicoladis & Genesee, 1997), as parents only want what is best for their children. Drawing a fine line between common myths, misunderstandings, and facts, certainly provides aid, although facts can be hard to come by (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).

One must acknowledge that a child is easily influenced. The public surrounding them has a great impact on their cognitive development. It is crucial whether the family, the community, the schools, or even just society in general, views (the) language(s) being acquired by the child (Gardner, 1968) and bilingualism itself, as a preferable and respected condition (Lee, 1996). Lambert's and Klineberg's (cited in Gardener, 1968) cross-cultural study, demonstrated in several countries, revealed how influential parents are when it comes to cultivating an approach towards other ethnic groups. Gardner's (1968) team had had their own research regarding the issue, and they experienced the same demeanour, also that "it seems reasonable to assume that the child reflects the attitudinal atmosphere of his home" (p. 143).

According to Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams (2013), parents' one main concern is whether bilingualism will cause confusion for their children. By confusion, one often means the misunderstood behaviour of a child who uses elements from their two languages in one sentence or conversation. This occurrence is called code mixing or switching (see in Blanco, 2021b; Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Jim Cummins, 1979; Genesee, 2014). Genesee (2014) points out how some people assume it as evidence that the child cannot separate their two languages. Nonetheless, according to Storied (2022), bilinguals are fully aware of performing it. Changing between languages for them is like using a mental switch. Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams (2013) go into detail about how children genuinely have a good reason to act in such a way. It can happen to young monolinguals, it can happen to young bilinguals: linguistic resource sometimes reaches its limit. If the bilingual child is not able to find the desired word in the language they are using at that moment, they can be resourceful and borrow a certain word from their other language. On top of that, young bilinguals do not tend to code mix carelessly. Research has showed that even by the age of two, these children can differentiate between the two languages based on which one their conversational partner is using. Monolingual infants stop discriminating between sounds by facial movements at the 8th month, despite this, bilinguals the same age are found to be still sensitive to do so (see also in Hoff, 2005).

Despite the common belief, that rather than being confused, bilingual children acquire better cognitive functions as well as obvious linguistic advantages (James Cummins, 1979). Knowing more languages can ease working, traveling, and establishing connections with speakers of different languages. The so-called 'bilingual advantage' occasionally has been exaggerated by

the popular press, however. For successful development, the reported advantages are not vital ingredients (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).

One person one language (see in Arsenian, 1937; Bialystok, 2011; Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Edwards, 2004; Nicoladis & Genesee, 1997), is quite a popular strategy for raising bilingual children. It consists of associating one person with a certain language and the other person with another language. Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams (2013) reveal how at a time this method was thought to be the only possible way to prevent a child from experiencing “intellectual fatigue” and confusion. Ronjat (cited in Arsenian, 1937; Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Schinke-Llano, 1989) was the first-ever parent to register the use the one-person-one-language method with his child who – exposed equally to German and French since birth – had an adequate pronunciation in, and had knowledge of both languages and was as intelligent as a monoglot child his age. The child became conscious of his bilingualism at 3 years old. Later, other brave parents decided to raise their children similarly, and all cases brought the same outcome (Arsenian, 1937). It is convenient to bear in mind that this is not the most common method for children worldwide to become bilingual (Nicoladis & Genesee, 1997), moreover, in several cases, children exposed to both languages by the same bilingual parent, successfully learn both languages. Also, studies have since shown that the one-person-one-language approach is not a necessity or is plentiful for successful bilingual acquisition. Even if a child is equally exposed to two languages during their early years, later bilingualism is not ensured. Some other common strategies use different languages to pair with different places – one language in the household one language someplace else – or time – one language during the morning hours one language during the afternoon, alternating days of the week etcetera –. Numerous bilingual methods can turn out to be fruitful as long as the aim is high quantity, high-quality (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). Genesee (2014) also stresses consistent language exposure as a crucial factor.

Several experts recommend providing fairly more input in a minority language in comparison to a majority one, as naturally less opportunity may arise for the child to use it. It goes without saying that in largely bilingual communities – for instance, Barcelona for Catalan and Spanish (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013) or Montreal for French and English (Genesee, 2014) – the ongoing use of the two languages is likely to be less challenged (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).

1.5.6 The bilingual child's reality

It is one thing to take care of, teach, or parent a bilingual child. Being a bilingual child is something completely different. I have discussed how multiple factors can influence a child's personal experience towards languages and bilingualism, yet the child's perspective may be different. When exploring university students' opinions about bilingualism, Küçükler's (2018) questioned the students concerning social, psychological, and personal spheres of bilingualism. It showed such a conclusion that positive attitudes are most likely expressed towards the phenomenon.

Gardner (1968) led several research in various locations and all the results clearly pointed in such a direction that components of attitude and motivation promote the acquisition of the second language. Positive attitudes towards French people or simply towards those who did not belong to the majority would be shown by those students who prioritized second language learning as it would lead to interactions with others who spoke French. These students had more motivation and therefore worked harder. This tendency resulted in a more successful acquirement of the French. Gardner decided to name this configuration 'integrative motive'.

In another research of Gardner's (1968), he examined Indian students' motivation to learn English. The findings suggested that while there is great enthusiasm during grades one and two, this level gradually decreases until grade seven. However, motivation appears to increase after grade eight and keeps on following this tendency until grade twelve. This also reflects the young child's energized attitude which can slowly develop into feeling apathy towards an educational system that might not feel meaningful to the individual, and finally, a mental awakening of the maturing juvenile who wishes to seize the opportunity of the possible importance of another language.

2. Research

2.1 Description of the research

2.1.1 Aims, objectives, and research questions

What would a former bilingual and/or multicultural child say now, as an adult? How is such a childhood different, how is it remembered? I aspire to explore the effects of different language circumstances, cultural and social settings a child experiences, and how they remember those times, years later. I desire to research the advantages and disadvantages one experiences as a child, and perhaps now as an adult, due to childhood bilingualism and multiculturalism. Do such children learn patience and a better understanding of others because of what they go through during the early, or not-so-early years? I seek to find out about cognitive and social aspects they might have encountered. Does it matter which language is taught first which is second? How can the environment make it difficult or easy for the language learner?

Science has been researching such issues for a long time now, and fortunately, nowadays much more of a much clearer view and a better understanding have been provided regarding the matter, in comparison to the ones 100 years before, when people started to develop more interest in languages and being multicultural. I believe these phenomena to be a unique and different personal experience for every individual, therefore I expect to hear diverse answers to the same questions. I intend to draw direct conclusions from the research regarding how childhood bilingualism and multiculturalism provide benefit or hardship both temporarily and permanently; how these phenomena are perceived by children and by adults; what bilingualism and multiculturalism can teach to an individual, how they might change them.

2.1.2 Methods and participants

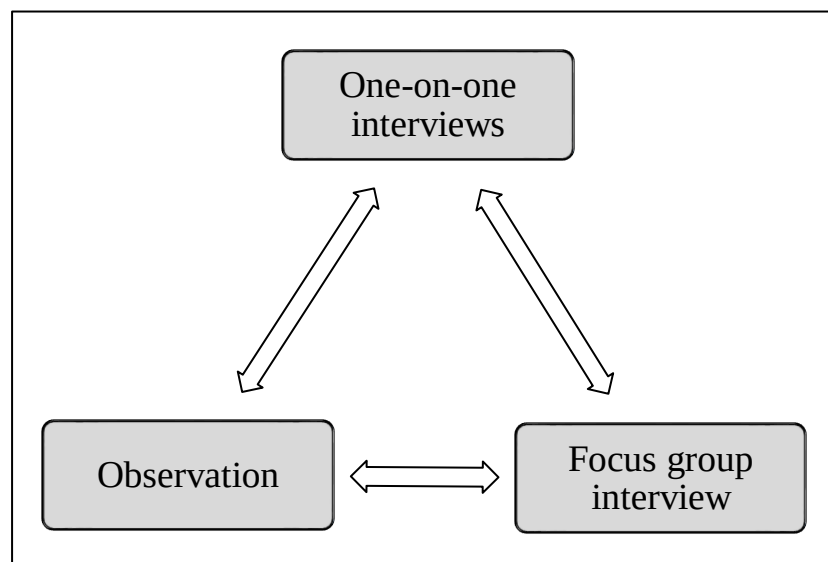
To increase the validity and credibility of my research I am exploring the issue from three sides. The three branches of my triangulation consist of personal one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and an observation. The four individual interview participants shared a bilingual childhood experience which they can all reflect on as adults. For this reason, I aim to raise questions, which can delve into how such an upbringing affected them both as children and later as adults. The four focus group interviewee all experienced multiculturalism during childhood. I seek to get a deeper understanding of their sense of self, how they contributed to the different cultures, if they did so if they faced favouritism and advantage or inequality and

disadvantage because of their cultural background. The case study is about two Chinese children I have been teaching English to for 6 months now. I shall reveal these children's relationship with a second language from the teacher's point of view.

All subjects in my research are anonym and there shall be no information mentioned which would lead to the disclosure of their identity. All interview participants provided consent to having their interviews audio tapped which they enclosed in written statements, validated with their signatures (see Appendix C). The audio tapes of the interviews only remained to exist until I transcribed them and no further. I am only providing the subjects' sex (F for female, M for male), age, and the first letter of their names. The only exceptions are going to be my students, where, to indicate their sibling relationship, I am going to use the first letter of their surname as well.

Figure 6

The method of triangulation



Note. The graph means to demonstrate the triangulation method of the research. The figure was made by the author of the paper.

2.1.3 Limitations of the research, ethical considerations

This study has some limitations. Only research, which already has been made and what it is possible to conclude from this triangulation provides guidelines for making statements. As the interviews and observation only provide a partial experience of the phenomena of bilingualism and multiculturalism, it is not to be applied as a general truth. As mentioned, my subjects remain anonym and the shared information cannot be used in any way to conclude their identity.

2.2 Results and discussion

2.2.1 One-on-one interviews

The participants' shared experience was a bilingual or multilingual childhood which they all reminisced now as something that took place more than 40 years ago. Them being between the ages of 49 and 65 was due to the circumstances of how I was introduced to them, I did not mean to choose this age group on purpose. The way they acquired multiple languages was quite varied. 'A' (F,65) moved to the United States at the age of six as her father got a job opportunity in New York. She had no prior language knowledge other than her mother tongue – Hungarian – and learned English, and later French, during her four years-long stay there. 'C' (M,57) was born into a multilingual family as a son of a Hungarian father and a Spanish mother. The family lived in Great Britain, 'C' learned Hungarian and English from birth, and then a few years later, he started acquiring Spanish from his mother. 'S' (M,49) was born in Hungary, as a child of Hungarian diplomats. At one year of age, his family was stationed in Venezuela where he started picking up his second language (Hungarian was his mother tongue), in his household, from the family's Spanish cleaning lady. The family moved around several Spanish-speaking countries; 'S' attended schools in Spanish throughout these years and learned English during adolescence.

Similarly to 'S', 'E' (F,57) was also a child of a Hungarian diplomat married couple. She learned Hungarian from birth in Hungary, then Spanish from the age of five, abroad. She started attending school in Latin America in the languages of Spanish, and English after turning fifteen. She did not stop adding languages to her repertoire as an adult, she has been living in the French-speaking area of Switzerland for more than 25 years now and has been trying to make the French language her own for a while now. 'V' (F, 52) was born and raised in Hungary with Hungarian being her mother tongue. However, one summer she got sent to Germany at

the age of eleven, for six weeks, to spend time with her father's family. After coming back to Hungary, she continued learning German, and during the following summer's six-week stay in Germany, she was able to acquire German at a native-like level. Later in her life, she learned English, then Portuguese. See Appendix A for the personal interview questions.

It is interesting to see how views differ concerning the ideal age for second (new) language acquisition. 'S''s approach, to wait until the mother tongue reaches a certain level, corroborates with what Schinke-Llano (1989) says about sequential acquisition. 'E' considers herself, as she said, "spot on", for being five years old when learning her second language. According to 'C' and 'A', it is the best to start "as soon as possible" and "at birth", which resonates with the critical period hypothesis (see in Hoff, 2005 and Genesee, 2014). 'V' thinks that it is not the time that matters for the acquisition, but the natural circumstance of it.

All participants praised their bilingual and multilingual upbringing, saying how the parents had no worries regarding their development. 'S''s case is an exception, as he mentions that between the ages of two and four, he did not speak at all. This proves how parents' concerns regarding childhood bilingualism may appear valid (see in Raising bilingual children). 'V''s experience also provides evidence that she went through discomfort as a child: "For example, I was put in a summer camp for children, in the summer, in the woods, among children younger than me. I felt like being in a zoo, and I am the animal to be watched by the others. That, here is a complete stranger, she doesn't speak the language at all, we have to involve her in all the activities, share every part of the life of this camp. It was really shocking; this was the first summer I was there. And I don't know, probably with my hands and feet, I asked the family on the third day or the fourth day, they were coming to visit us in this camp, that they should take me home!". Also, 'A' was treated as an "oddity" among Hungarians, after her four years spent in the United States. In addition, 'E' confesses how "It is not a particularly good feeling" to feel the need to "pick up the pace", as she lagged of in her studies in comparison to her native peers, and how she was feeling inadequate for a time when she experienced fading in her language skills after not using the specific language for a certain amount of time. This proves what Butler & Hakuta (2004) and Baker (2011) noted regarding the development factor of bilingualism (see in Dimensions of bilingualism).

About whether it is possible to speak a second language without an accent, 'A''s response was about her having an accent in her first language as a child, due to her second language, which

resonates with what Butler & Hakuta (2004) and Baker (2011) concluded (see at Dimensions of bilingualism). ‘S’ and ‘E’ share a very interesting trait about their Spanish skills. Both emphasize that, to this day, they still have the same Spanish accent as where they mostly acquired it, and to this day, everywhere they go they receive questions such as “Are you Venezuelan?” and “Are you from Uruguay?”, because of this occurrence. ‘C’'s experience with his brother being able to speak all the languages he has ever learned accent-free, proves what Asher & García (1969) note about older children being able to acquire a second language with fine pronunciation. According to ‘V’, “I think it's possible to not have an accent in the second language, but you need to have good ears for that.”

Their main opinions matched regarding having a broader understanding of the world, being able to think from various perspectives, having developed open-mindedness, and having received better educational and vocational opportunities, which is what Küçükler (2018) and Genesee (2014) mentioned in their studies. They also agreed on bilingualism and multilingualism advantageously affecting cognitive skills, some of them strongly believe to be experiencing them personally. This echoes what Blanco (2021a; 2021b), Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams (2013), Schinke-Llano (1989) and Storied (2022) voiced.

2.2.2 Focus group interviews

The participants of the focus group interview were quite varied. ‘P’ (F,27) is Hungarian. She lived in several Latin American countries since the age of eight, due to her parents being diplomats. She identifies with the Hungarian and the “Latina” culture. ‘Z’ (F,31) ‘s father is Moroccan, and her mother is Hungarian. Therefore, along with being embedded in the two countries’ cultures since birth, she also acquired multiple languages early in her life. ‘X’ (M,26) was born into a British-American family, which meant him having been introduced to and involved with these cultures since birth. ‘I’ (M,48) is Hungarian and was born in Hungary, but just a year later, his family moved to Tunisia, where they lived for several years. The diplomat family came back to Hungary, but when ‘I’ was twelve, they moved to Belgium. He finds his connections to Hungarian, Tunisian, and Belgian cultures the roots of his multiculturalism and identity. See Appendix B for the focus group interview questions.

The participants shared similarities in their approach, still, everyone has some sort of unique addition to cultures and languages. ‘P’ suffered discrimination as a child because of her lacking

Spanish skills and the fact that she spoke it with an accent. She has always found strong relations between language and culture which proves what Hamers & Blanc (2000) composed. She found resemblance between the Mexican and Hungarian cultures. When she came back to Hungary, she was, as she said, “too Latino” for the Hungarians. She recalls bullying a major part of her teenage years. She emphasized how the mix of languages brings her to have multiple personalities. “For me, it's always been the best mix everywhere... And I feel like whenever I'm speaking one language or another, I have a different personality... Basically I'm me but my sense of humor, for example, is very different in all three languages.” ‘Z’ experienced negativity as well, even though the source for hers was her mixed race. She experiences a shift in ideology, mindset, and way of thinking, depending on whether she speaks to her Moroccan father or Hungarian mother, also when she is in Morocco or in Hungary. She feels as, now that people learn languages earlier and might know more about the world, they are more open toward those who might differ from them.

‘X’ finds his way of distinguishing between cultures different from the others, as his American and British identity relies on the same language. Yet, he understands that his approach towards Americans and the British was never the same, as cultural norms suggest different behaviours. He counted as an oddity when he lived in America as a British child. “I suppose, living in America as a kid with a British accent you are kind of like a circus animal. Because everyone kind of presumes that you are like Shakespeare and... Or super intelligent... I guess that's favoritism but also in the negative connotation.” Also, from an early age, he detected that his interests were unlike his peers. A very interesting element from his experience is an unsaid shared understanding between people from his home country: “As someone living in a country which I am not bilingual in, the language is kind of the shared experience. When I interact with someone who's also anglophone and a native English speaker, it's quite interesting... You're basically drawn together, though, I guess, a shared experience of living in a country, where the main language is not your mother tongue... It's either linguistic or cultural understanding.”

‘I’ falls into a different age group than the other participants, which he gave voice to as well, stating that he perceives the phenomena of multiculturalism and languages from a more complex perspective, unlike how the others might. He also experienced a multicultural childhood during the 1980's, meaning Europe was strongly divided into East and West. Living in several diverse countries, and experiencing the changes the world went through, he now thinks of languages and cultures in a great big whole. His approach resonates with what Baker

(2011) thinks of balanced biculturalism. “Being an adult, you start understanding, and I am the oldest here, and you will understand that when you will get to my age, that the time, it's just like for wine, it makes your understanding more mature and things just merge. So, with time, you accept, you respect, and you're delighted by multiculturalism, the more you experience it.” Another interesting observation of his is how different languages “exist” within him. “Counting is something that helps you understand what language is the closest to you. Because when it comes to figures and numbers, you come back to your “good” language because you don't want to miss...”. “Things become images in your mind, and you relate words to it in different languages. That's why translating, for instance, is not so easy for us. You have to learn translating. Being bilingual or multilingual, translating between the languages is a difficulty because it's not the same bridge... You don't really think in words or in languages anymore, it's just things that you see... A shoe; you imagine it in your mind. It's not about the word shoe, or “cipő”, or “chaussure”, or “zapato” ... You see the shoe as an image, a drawing of a shoe, the shoe you wear... That's how I think I'm related to languages today.” Figure 7 contains the main answers of the participants.

Figure 7*Data collected into table from the focus group interview*

ASPECTS	‘P’ (M,27)	‘Z’ (F,31)	‘X’ (M,26)	‘I’ (M,48)
Change of personal connections towards cultures	Appreciates cultures more now, than as a child.	More comfortable with the culture of residency. As she has been residing in Hungary for the longer time feels more connected to Hungary	He cannot relate to his American heritage as strongly as he did as a child, distance has grown in between that side of his family and him as well.	Views culture totally differently than as he did as a child. What he thinks about cultures and the world provides one big global identity.
Favouritism and discrimination	Experienced discrimination, feelings of not belonging anywhere, abroad and in home country, as a child.	Experienced bad comments as a child in Hungary because of being half Moroccan, half Hungarian, but it had no effect on her.	Children bullied him for his odd accent. Living in the United States he experienced favouritism and discrimination. As an adult in Hungary, he experiences favouritism.	“Well, I'm multilingual, tall, I was handsome as a kid, white, heterosexual male. So, I can say that I've been favored by all cultures all my life.”
Main difference between a monocultural and a multicultural child	In her case the main difference was language. She thinks that those who experienced living in several parts of the world and speak more languages are more emphatic and open.	She agrees with P. She thinks that multiculturalism and being involved with more than one cultures bring open-mindedness.	He agrees with the two participants talking before him. As a child he was interested in other things in comparison to his peers. He thinks his upbringing brought more diverse people into his life from an early stage.	He thinks multiculturalism made him realise how favoured and lucky he was since birth.
Relationship between cultures and languages	She finds herself change in terms of humour and identity when surrounded by different people from different cultures. She	She would always shift between languages and cultures she identifies with based on which home country she is	Even though the language is the same he has to manipulate his interactions based on whether he speaks to Americans or British people. In a	He had hardships settling back to his home country (Hungary) after spending all his life abroad. At the age of 18 he spoke

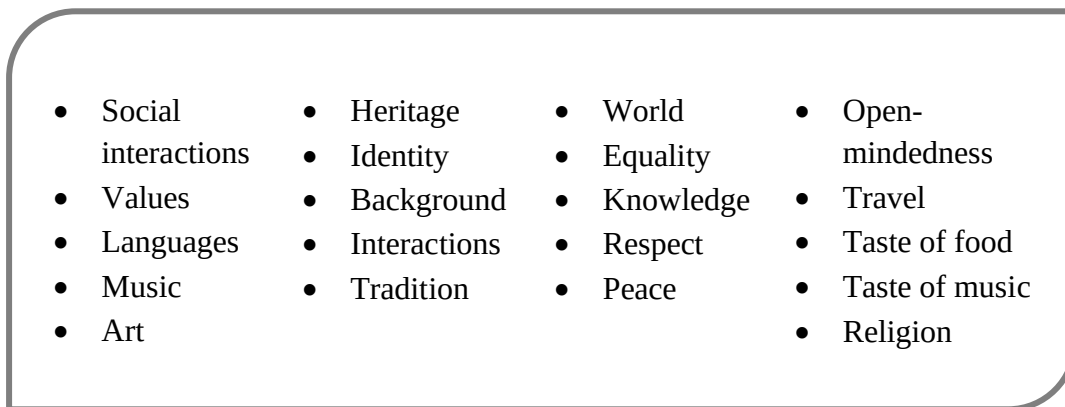
	considers her having as many personalities as many languages she speaks, her humour is different in her different languages.	in. She finds herself more home in the Hungarian culture now as she has been living here for the long run.	different country he feels being drawn to people from his own culture.	better French than Hungarian.
Bilingualism; language of thinking and dreams	She considers herself trilingual. She uses that language to think which she is using in the current situation with others. She thinks because she has done most of her studies in Spanish, is why she mostly recalls her Spanish dreams.	She usually dreams and thinks in the language of the home country where she is at the current moment.	He thinks and dreams in English, but when he was residing in Spain, he used Spanish to think many times.	According to him, for multilingual people thinking cannot operate in one language. He does not attach words to meaning, but pictures and images to meaning. He says that his wife tells him that he would speak in French when he is asleep.

Note. The table provides a summary of the answers from the focus group interview. The table was made by the author of the paper.

I requested the participants to write down five words or phrases they associate with the word ‘culture’. Figure 8 demonstrates their answers. The participants decided to change their answers when they would see that another participant had already written the desired word or phrase down.

Figure 8

Words and phrases the focus group participants associated with 'culture'



• Social interactions	• Heritage	• World	• Open-mindedness
• Values	• Identity	• Equality	• Travel
• Languages	• Background	• Knowledge	• Taste of food
• Music	• Interactions	• Respect	• Taste of music
• Art	• Tradition	• Peace	• Religion

Note. The figure shows 20 words and phrases in association with 'culture'. The table was made by the author of the paper.

2.2.3 Observation

In July 2023, I posted advertisements in multiple Facebook groups created for English teachers and students, stating that I am available as a private English teacher for children. For a month it seemed to me that it is no success as no applicants showed serious intentions. In August, a woman contacted me, and I discussed the details of the first occasion I would meet the family on whose behalf she reached out to me. They were a Chinese family living in Budapest for a long time. The following week I started visiting their home every day to practise English with their 7-year-old son. Three weeks in, the mother asked me if I would teach another Chinese family's children and gave me their contact info. This is how I ended up at the 'C' household, where I met 'CX' (M,15), 'CS' (M,12), and their father, in September. The father and I could discuss the details of when and how should I practice English with his sons, in Hungarian. His level of Hungarian was suitable for such a conversation, and he alarmed me that from that time on it was going to be the children's mother home when I visited, and she did not speak Hungarian nor English so I should have been prepared to not have a way to communicate with her. Later, I found out that the children moved to Budapest in July 2023 with their mother. Their father has been residing in the country since 2000. The father owns two shops in Miskolc; accordingly, he is there during the weekdays. Nonetheless, it is him who contacts me (and who I can reach out to) whether a class cannot be held, or some other issue comes up.

I have been visiting them since September, three times a week, practicing English for one hour with each of them every time. The children soon realised that there is no need to be uptight as we are in the home setting, and I do not expect them to be serious at all times and perform without mistakes. Not long after our first encounters, trust started forming between us, they started to share about their personal life and ask about mine as well. ‘CX’ is more fluent in English, as he had started studying it three years before his brother, due to this fact he can hold a pithier conversation with me. I found out from him that all three children of the ‘C’ family were born in Hungary. The oldest child, the sister, is now 19 years old, was born in Budapest and is attending university in Beijing. I have had the opportunity to meet her several times now since she travels to Hungary to reunite with the family when she has holidays. ‘CX’ was born in Budapest, but most likely by accident (the family lived in Miskolc during that time), as he made his entrance to this world months before he was due. ‘CS’ was born in Miskolc, where the family mostly resided between 2004 and 2012.

In 2012 the children had been moved back to Fuzhou, China, where they started to live mostly with their grandparents. After 2012 their mother started flying back and forth between China (to her children) and Hungary (to her husband). Once or twice a year the father could fly to China with his wife and spend some time with the children as well, also the children were flown to Hungary every summer to spend it at Miskolc. Nonetheless, this all changed when Covid-19 appeared, first in China, then shortly after, globally. During 2020 and 2021 the parents could not leave Hungary, nor the children could leave China, to reunite. Maybe this had a great impact on the children’s speech pattern, as ‘CS’ and ‘CX’ do not speak the same dialect as any of their parents or grandparents. The children speak the Fuzhou (where they lived between 2012 and 2023) dialect, whereas the parents and grandparents all speak the dialect of the prefecture where they resided during their own childhood.

Despite the father’s permanent and almost 25 years long residency in Hungary, and now the bigger part of the extended family living here (I do not know the details, yet I have been told that the father’s sister’s family also lives somewhere in Hungary, and the grandparents on the father’s side now also mostly reside in Miskolc), their strong connection with the Chinese culture remains. They celebrate the New Year’s, the Autumn and Spring Festivals according to the Chinese traditions. The children’s memory is also still very fresh of their earlier life in Fuzhou. ‘CX’ now and then tells me about the oppressive conditions Chinese students go through. Due to the country’s overpopulation and the scanty number of preferable schools,

children are raised to rival each other when it comes to education. Classes until night, difficult curricula, tough exams. He once drew me three circles right under each other, explaining that those who belong to the top circle have the best scores, they can get into any university they want, and have the best job opportunities. Those who belong to the second circle have better abilities than most of the students, but they have limited options when it comes to education and the job market. According to him, that is supposed to be the group where her sister belongs. The lowest circle, he said, is the general public. Those who belong to this mass study well but do not have either many or good quality options. He told me his brother and he would belong to this group. He followed by letting me in on how his unsatisfactory score on the junior high school entrance exam was a great motive for their mother, 'CS', and him to move to Hungary permanently.

As at school, they have quite a few Chinese classmates, they do not feel the need to establish relationships with those who are from different countries. This being said, I am the closest to them who they can gather information from when it comes to different cultures. We have built a profound relationship through time, so they are not hesitant to give voice to their curiosity or let me know some things from their private interests. Because 'CX' is more fluent in English, and possibly because of his older age, he tends to ask me multiple questions about Hungary, Europe, and what I personally think of China.

I find a difference between how the boys think of English. 'CS' sometimes shows a tendency of thinking of it as a bother and as something he only participates in as a must. In comparison, 'CX' wishes to be better at English to be more successful at school and later, on the job market. Their attitudes reflect what Gardner (1968) concludes about how the relationship between pupil and second language changes throughout the school years. However, it happens quite often that one or the other gives voice to the frustration, that they feel as their level of English, according to them, is 'not good' or 'bad'. This very much reminds me of how I perceived my own level of English at their age. Also, their worries are not reasonable as their English improves every week. There must be social pressure, pressure from the school, nonetheless (maybe unintentional) pressure from the parents. Gardner's (1968) observation about the accepting home environment showing direct association with second language acquisition reverberates in the boys' case, however, in terms of the parents wishing the children to acquire language as soon as possible (they attend an English-only institute during the weekdays, have the extra hours with me after school, and "weekend school", as they call it, which means taking group

English lessons during the weekends as well). These attitudes manifest in the children into an anxious need to better themselves at English and not feeling satisfied with their current language levels. As Kovács & Trentinné (2016) put it: language is a practical skill. Using it more leads to being better at it. Therefore, the teacher has the freedom to choose what to teach as long as it is in the target language. So why not teach self-confidence and self-expression?

Them being “forced” to communicate with me in English, puts them in a situation that pushes them to use the target language even when there are phrases they might only know the Chinese equivalent of. This occurs quite often when they wish to tell me about their life and interests. I am using this motivation to integrate the language input. This way I have used ‘CX’'s interest in space travel to assign an essay on three Chinese astronauts, as homework. Another example was giving ‘CS’ homework on armadillos, when he saw a picture of one, all of a sudden, he was filled with enthusiasm to tell me he had seen this animal in a videogame before. It could be argued that this results in them getting less lexical language input, like practicing grammar. Such argument would perhaps stand as a valid concern. However, this method has a chance of correcting their anxious attitude towards their second language. Physical signs of stress can be seen on these two children, especially on the younger one. What proves that this stress is due to his perception of how well he can speak English, is how the amount of “I don’t know” as a response to most questions, the shaking, and the involuntary eye movements have been taking place less as the time passed, while he has acquired more and more English. During the first month of teaching ‘CS’, he could barely speak any English, but now I can have an adequate conversation with him.

A main principle as a preschool teacher is that children should be praised as many times as possible while giving a reason for why each praise was provided. Why is this a custom in preschool only? Many children do not receive enough praise at home, let alone at primary and, or secondary school. Why do we accept that children collectively do not believe in themselves? How is it that we teach children, during their early years, to embrace all the good in themselves (some are not taught to do this even at such age), yet many of them become highly fixated on their mistakes during their school years?

Growing up I had a rather ponderous relationship with the English language. Arguing in school with my secondary school English teacher, and arguing at home with my parents, mostly due to my inadequate grades or attitude towards the language. I genuinely believed proficiency to

be some sort of fake, unreachable light at the end of the tunnel. I had not believed in myself throughout most years of secondary school, and it did not single-handedly lead to low performance and mental health issues, but it certainly accelerated the process. I do not wish the same on any child. I will not tolerate children ruining their childhood years by being anxious about learning English. I wish I could go back to my childhood self to tell her that just a few years later I, myself, teach English and that my students, and many people before, thought me to be a native speaker. I intend to quote 'CX', who turned to me once and asked, "You are Hungarian, but you think in English, right?". I have been using my own story to motivate my students. If I could learn English this well, so can they.

I believe my pedagogy works well with foreign children because there is a mutual, shared understanding of what English can mean to a person, either in a negative or positive connotation. We only have English to communicate, which pushes them to take extra effort into phrasing what they would like to say. I could develop a trusted, personal connection with these children because we all have our own cultural understanding, and we are delighted to share them. Still, we are eager to learn about the other's perspective and experiences. Hearing about the other person's circumstances broadens our perspective while creating a bond.

Personal reflections

I find that languages to be quite obscure by nature. Language cannot be taken away, if it is used, it is owned. It is personal, yet it brings us together. Humans are societal beings. The beauty of languages comes from that ancient sacredness, that they were created from the need to connect. It is admirable how humans made sounds and created figures, to be able to somehow signal, to understand one another. So here we are today. More than 7000 languages connect more than 8 billion people. It is a big world, nonetheless, it keeps on growing for a person who acquires more languages. Like doors, which open to new rooms of a house. One can live in one room of a house for a whole life yet exploring what other rooms can offer only brings delight. By acquiring more languages your house has more rooms, more rooms which can be filled with more and diverse people. I intend to cite one of my interview participants, 'V', "If you read books in another language... It is such a huge experience. The same story can be so different! If you are able to read a poem in Hungarian or German or English, the same poem, it is a different thing. I think it is so nice to be able to feel these little differences between the "same" text, just in different languages." To acquire more languages is to be changed, to be filled with more life.

This research not only opened my eyes about childhood bilingualism and multiculturalism but also inspired me to be eager to meet more people from different cultures and to acquire more languages myself. Every participant enjoyed partaking in this research to such an extent which genuinely surprised me. They found the interviews so thought-provoking, and so exciting that keeping the conversation going for another 15 minutes or so was the usual tendency. Everyone loved sharing their experiences about their bilingual and/or multicultural childhood and were eager to find out about my motives, and what pushed me to do this research. In addition, it was amazing for me to see that those four focus group participants, who did not know each other before or just partially, could get along so well and were interested in what is a shared experience and what might differ in their multicultural upbringing.

I am utterly grateful for my two Chinese students who trust and respect me so much they shared their personal stories and unique upbringing with me out of pure desire to tell me about themselves. It is also thanks to them that I can think of and respect myself as a teacher.

Summary and conclusions

The main conclusion of this research is how being involved in multiple languages and cultures broadens the perspective, draws attention to new interests, different interests, and helps the individual to get a deeper, more complex understanding of how other people might operate. All my findings pointed in such a direction that knowing more languages and belonging to multiple cultural groups provide advantages. There are cognitive and economic benefits to knowing more than one language, nevertheless, my research has proven that the greatest gift it provides is being more open to your surroundings which proves what Küçükler (2018) mentions in his study. The sense of togetherness and belonging are also great benefits. My participants emphasized that they consider themselves lucky and grateful for having experienced bilingual and multicultural childhood. The tendency was that they have become even more thankful for their childhood experiences as time passed, and they treasure and cherish their upbringing even more now, as adults. I shall quote what 'C' said, "I've never considered the fact that I'm actually learning a language.". As 'I' phrased it, "It took me a lot of time to accept the many cultures that exist, and to respect the other cultures, and myself, and my role in this multicultural world." and 'P' simply stated that "I guess I appreciate culture more now than when I was a child."

In a video by the British Council (2017) children are asked why they want to learn languages. They give answers as wanting to learn Spanish because Spanish is the most spoken language in several countries; wishing to learn Arabic, as he has neighbours who speak Arabic, and he would like to understand some of what they talk about. One of the children states that all languages are strikingly useful, and everyone can have a different opinion on which language is the most important to them. What my adult participants shared during the interviews resonated with what these children expressed. "Every language you learn is a gift" – said 'E'.

On the contrary, the interviews and my observation have also shown that when being put into a different cultural or language group, a child can experience discrimination, pressure, and perhaps negative feelings for certain reasons. When it comes to language, a child might feel a lack of security (see 'S''s and 'V''s case), the need to perform on a certain level and way to impress parents (see in Observation), experience unacceptance from peers (see in 'P''s case), endure pressure when trying to keep up with school (see 'E''s and 'I''s case). When it comes to cultural indifference, the child might receive negative comments (see 'Z''s case), be treated as an oddity (see 'X''s and 'A''s case), feeling excluded from groups ('P' saying how she did

not belong to the Latinos, but later not belong to the Hungarians; 'Z' being too Hungarian for the Moroccans and too Moroccan for the Hungarians), and being interested in other topics than peers (see 'X''s case).

I am going to continue this research by examining more what personal feelings people have towards languages and cultures. Especially studying the relationship between people and those languages and cultures which they cannot call their own. It would be beneficial to approach how people perceive languages and cultures by having diversified age groups. How people of different age view such phenomena, and if growing up affects how one might perceive a language, a culture. I would also research how children and how adults perceive language learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Personal interview questions

- How old are you now, and how old were you when you started acquiring a second language? Under what circumstance/circumstances did you acquire your first and second language?
- Looking back at your bilingual childhood what is the first thing that pops into your mind?
- Do you think you had started acquiring another language in an ideal age? If there is a 'best time' to start acquiring a new language, when do you think that is?
- Were your parents concerned about your language development regarding either of your spoken languages? Have you ever felt like knowledge of one of your languages means harm to the other one?
- Do you feel like you possess the same fluency in all your languages? Do you have an accent in any of your languages? Do you think it is possible to not have an accent in one's second language?
- Did bilingualism cause you discomfort as a child? Feeling like your proficiency is not as good as your native peers'/lacking confidence to communicate in a certain language/code switching issues/not being able to recall desired words or phrases in a certain language etc.
- What advantages/disadvantages did you have as a bilingual child? How did being a child in a different language environment at home and in social groups, educational circumstances, affect you? What advantages/disadvantages do you think have as an adult because of your bilingual upbringing?
- Could the bilingual environment provide security for your child self? Would you have felt more comfortable if you had been able to speak your other language in social and educational circumstances? What were your personal feelings towards bilingualism as a child and have they changed as time passed?
- What do you reckon to be the main difference between a bilingual and a monolingual child?
- Do you believe bilinguals have cognitive benefits? If yes, have you ever experienced them?

- Do you think of yourself as multicultural?
- Do your circumstances push you to still practice bilingualism in a daily basis? If not or not to the same extent, do you miss experiencing that?
- In which language of yours do you think? In which language of yours do you dream?

Appendix B: Focus group interview questions

- When you think of what culture means to you, what are 5 words that pop into your mind? (I am going to use these answers later to create a world-cloud)
- How old are you now, and how old were you when you started to be a part of more than one cultural group? Under what circumstance/circumstances did you become part of such groups?
- Has your personal connection to all your cultures changed over time? Do all your cultures have the same influence on you and the same meaning to you now, as they had on your child self?
- Have you experienced favouritism or discrimination due to your cultural difference? Either by your peers or adults during childhood, or later, during adulthood?
- What do you reckon to be the main difference between a monocultural and a multicultural child?
- For you, what is the relationship between cultures and languages? Do you consider yourself bilingual as well? If yes, in which language of yours do you think and dream?

Appendix C: Consent form

Informed consent form (audio tape)

Consent Form for Audio taping and Transcribing Interviews

Study Title: “The Advantages and Challenges of Childhood Bilingualism”

Researcher: Luca Fekete, *Eötvös Lóránd University, Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education*

This study involves the audio taping of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio tape or the transcript. Only the researcher will be able to listen to the tapes.

The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations all written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study.

By signing this form, you are consenting to:

having your interview taped;

having the tape transcribed;

the use of the written transcript in presentations and written products.

This consent for taping is effective until 2024/06/15. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Participant's signature_____

Date: 2024/03/18

EREDETISÉGNYILATKOZAT

Alulírott

név:

FEKETE LUCA

születési hely, idő:

2000. 01. 26., BUDAPEST

szak:

ÓVODAPEDAGÓGUS

NEPTUN-kód:

G03PCT

büntetőjogi és fegyelmi felelősségem tudatában nyilatkozom és aláírással igazolom, hogy a(z)

THE ADVANTAGES (→) AND

CHALLENGES OF CHILDHOOD BILINGUALISM

című szakdolgozat saját, önálló szellemi munkám eredménye.

Kijelentem, hogy megismertem az ELTE HKR hatályos szabályzatának „A hallgatók által végzett munka jogtisztasága” c. fejezetét (74/A, 74/B, 74/C §), ezek ismeretében a dolgozat elkészítése során betartottam az idegen szerzői mű felhasználására és a felhasználás jelölésére vonatkozó követelményeket.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy szakdolgozat/diplomamunka esetén plágiumnak számít:

- ☐ a szó szerinti idézet közlése idézőjel és hivatkozás megjelölése nélkül;
- ☐ a tartalmi idézet hivatkozás megjelölése nélkül;
- ☐ más publikált gondolatainak saját gondolatként való feltüntetése.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy ha szakdolgozatom nem felel meg az idézésre és a forrás megjelölésére vonatkozó, fentebb említett előírásoknak, akkor a vonatkozó fegyelmi és/vagy büntetőjogi jogkövetkezményekkel kell számolnom, a dolgozatot pedig az ELTE szabályzata szerint értékelhetetlennek kell tekinteni.

Budapest, 20... 24. 04. 20.

Fekete Luca

hallgató aláírása

Kérelem TDK pályamunka szakdolgozatként történő elfogadására

Tisztelt TDK Műhelyvezető Asszony/Úr!

Alulírott, FEKETE LUCA, (Neptun-kód: 603PCT) az ELTE TÓK ÓVODAPEDAGÓGUS NAPPALI szakos hallgatója azzal a kéréssel fordulok Önhöz, hogy a kari Tudományos Diákköri pályamunkámat szakdolgozatként elfogadni szíveskedjen.

Kérésem oka, hogy a Kari Tudományos Diákköri Konferencián 2024. ÁPRILIS hó 17 -án/én a THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF CHILDHOOD BILINGUALISM című pályamunkámmal részt vettem, s dolgozatom az írásbeli bírálaton a 45 pontot elérte.

Budapest, 2024.04.19.

Fekete Luca
Hallgató aláírása

A TDK-dolgozatot gondozó műhely vezetőjeként a hallgató kérését támogatom. A HKR 492.§ (3) bekezdés értelmében az írásbeli bírálaton legalább 45 pontot elérő TDK-pályamunka a szakdolgozati benyújtás esetén a szakdolgozatokra előírt tartalmi és formai követelményeknek kell megfeleljen. A hivatkozott szabálypontban foglaltak teljesülését ellenőriztem és igazolom.

A TDK-dolgozatot gondozó műhely vezetőjének neve: DR. ÁRVA VALÉRIA

TDK-dolgozatot gondozó műhely vezetőjének aláírása: _____

Budapest, 2024.04.19.