

**BILINGUALISM IN CHILDREN: CLASSIFICATIONS, QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS.  
BILINGUALS AND BILINGUAL INTERPRETERS**

**Peter K. KORNAKOV**

*St-Petersburg State University (Russia)  
University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK*

**INTRODUCTION**

When I was a student learning Spanish as my third language in my late teens, and then as an interpreter and translator from Spanish into Russian and from Russian into Spanish in my early and midtwenties, I was constantly asking myself the same questions:

- How does one learn a foreign language?
- How should one learn the language in order to be able to speak really fluently?
- When does real fluency begin?
- Is it possible to achieve fluency if one starts learning late in life (at university, for example)? Is it too late to start learning foreign languages at the age of 17 or 18, or even in one's 30s and 40s?
- When is the best time to start learning a second and third language?

It was in Cuba that I became interested in bilingualism in children, because my two sons in a very short period of time became bilingual without studying Spanish as a second language as I had studied it. They simply picked it up from their surroundings, on the street, playing with other children of their own age in the playground or going almost every day to Cuban kindergarten and school.

My two sons were very young at the time (five and three years of age), yet the process of acquiring the second language (Cuban Spanish) took approximately three to five months (to start speaking more or less fluently, while playing).

What are the mechanisms of a child's natural acquisition process that we –adults– can borrow from them when learning the second language? Is it possible to copy the natural process of learning when we are studying as adults acquiring our second or third language in an "artificial" way? If it is possible, what do we need to do? What should we emulate?

How can the child in different circumstances become bilingual? Does it mean that any child in the same circumstances within the multilingual environment will necessarily be bilingual?

## Part One

### LANGUAGES AND BILINGUALISM

In the post-industrial society at the end of the twentieth century, bilingualism and polylingualism or multilingualism play an important social and cultural role and have, in theory, become accessible to the vast majority of the population. Is it potentially possible to propagate bilingualism throughout the world, and if so, is it desirable to learn foreign languages in modern societies?

The problem is so multifaceted that we have to take into account many factors:

- There currently exist almost 180 states in the world, and the total number of languages varies between hundreds and thousands (the difference is so vast because the difference between languages and dialects provokes heated debate);
- In 55 countries the state language is not the language spoken by the majority of the population;
- In 38 countries there are two state languages, while four countries have three state languages (Andorra: Catalan, French and Spanish; Vanuatu: English and French are official languages, Bislama (the Vanuatu pidgin) is the national language, spoken by more than 80 per cent of the population; Seychelles Islands; and Switzerland: French, German and Italian);
- In Singapore there are four state languages: English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil;
- English is spoken in 52 countries, French in 35, Arabic in 32, Spanish in 20, Portuguese in 8, German in 7, Italian and Chinese in 4, Dutch and Swahili in 3 countries.

In general, foreign language studies (of the main official UN languages: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese) are increasing despite the fall in popularity of the Russian language. Among the most studied languages today are English, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese, while in some countries, such as Finland and Norway, Russian is still among the most studied foreign languages.

I shall now proceed to give a brief synopsis of children's bilingualism, beginning from first principles.

- **What does the child need in order to learn the first language?**
- **Can the newborn human become "lingual" without the support of society, or in other words, without any support from his or her parents and relatives?**

The naturally occurring "experiments" with so-called "wolf-children", "bear-children", "Mowgli" or "monkey-children" and other such feral youngsters have been widely reported for hundreds of years. None of them could speak or understand speech and, indeed, most efforts to teach them language ended in failure. And the wild children recovered by human society died at an early age. If the child passes some critical period far from the natural source of language he or she will lose the capacity for language acquisition and for socialization in general.

The Russian educationalist, Boris **Nikitin** (1969), formulated the theory of the "**Irreversible Extinction of the Possibilities for the Effective Development of Abilities**"

– ИЕРЕДА (“*HYBЭPC: Heo6мoe Yзacaиe Boзмoжнocтeи Эффeктиeнoгo Paзeития Cпocобнocтeи*”). Probably the most evident manifestation of this law is our innate ability to swim, which is normally lost by almost all newborns when their parents do not allow their babies to preserve it in their first weeks of post-natal life.

This language ability, so distinctive for humans, can also disappear if we get beyond the *critical period* and isolate the newborn from human society where he or she will be surrounded by other human beings speaking in any language.

If the normal child remains in human society he or she will definitely become "lingual" no matter what, no matter how, sooner or later. The time margin is very narrow: from the day of birth, or even earlier, until roughly two years. Both time borders depend on what is understood by being “lingual”, but nobody questions the child’s ability to communicate with other humans by means of language at the age of two or three.

●But how can the child become bilingual? Under what circumstances is it possible to produce and reproduce bilinguals?

Here it will be necessary to consider both individual and social manifestations of bilingualism, because there is a fundamental difference between the two. It is possible to consider India, Switzerland and Belgium as multilingual countries; Canada as a State is officially bilingual, as are Finland, Andorra, Paraguay and Luxembourg. Bilingualism may be the norm in these parts of the world, but at the same time, of the countries mentioned above, individual bilingualism may be widespread in only Luxembourg, Paraguay and Andorra. The number of monolinguals in the remaining countries significantly exceeds the number of potential bilinguals.

●What do we understand by bilingualism? It is time for some definitions of the phenomenon.

The most famous definition was offered by Uriel **Weinreich** (1968: 1), one of the "fathers" of bilingual studies and a bilingual himself, in his renowned book **Languages in Contact**: "*The practice of alternately using two languages will be called BILINGUALISM, and the person involved, BILINGUAL*".

Leonard **Bloomfield** (1935: 55-56) added the notion of a certain "degree of perfection" in bilingualism<sup>1</sup>, and William **Mackey** (1957: 51) incorporates Weinreich’s alternate use of two languages into Bloomfield's reservations with regard to the degree of proficiency.

To the degree of proficiency has to be added *the evaluation of the act of communication*. This is achieved by:

---

1 "In ... cases where ... perfect foreign-language learning is not accompanied by loss of the native language, it results in bilingualism, native-like control of two languages. After early childhood few people have enough muscular and nervous freedom or enough opportunity and leisure to reach perfection in a foreign language... Of course one cannot define a degree of perfection at which a good foreign speaker becomes a bilingual: the distinction is relative".

- self evaluation by the speaker.** (As a rule, we have our own inner evaluation such as “satisfactory” or “failed” every time we speak in L2<sup>2</sup>. We evaluate ourselves how fully and adequately we express our thoughts, ideas, feelings and wishes);
- evaluation of the bilingual speaker** (expressing him- or herself in L2) **by the native speaker** (even if we evaluate ourselves with the highest mark, the native speaker also evaluates us, and his or her evaluation does not always coincide with ours);
- practice** (is applied for the type of scenario where the bilingual speaker and the native speaker are both wrong in their evaluations, and the first one is satisfied with his “speech” in the L2 and the second one is satisfied as well by what he thinks he has understood. In such a case, the real misunderstanding in fact will affect communication. Even when we talk the same language, the mechanisms of evaluating communication remain the same).

### ●So what is bilingualism?

Research into bilingualism and bilinguality is interdisciplinary in character, involving social sciences, such as sociology, psychology and linguistics. It has to adopt from them different methods, criteria and points of view.

The main factors to be taken into account when describing bilingualism<sup>3</sup>:

1. **The age of the bilingual at the time of the acquisition of the L2** varies and therefore several definitions should be taken into account, such as:

*"early bilingualism" vs. "late bilingualism"*

whereby the first one is sometimes called "*infant or child bilingualism*" and the second one is considered "*adult bilingualism*". The age borders are not established yet, but it is current practice to say that child bilingualism corresponds to the age between about three years and puberty<sup>4</sup>. In any case, the criteria and demands with respect to “child” bilingualism and to their self-expression in the L2 are considerably lower than to the “adult” one. Moreover, children’s mistakes while speaking in L2 differ in character, nature and gender, from those of an adult.

2. **The context in which the child acquires the second language**

*"natural (primary) bilingualism" vs "achieved (secondary) bilingualism"*

The first term implies L2 acquisition when the child acquires two languages from the speakers around him or her in an unstructured way. The process involves no teaching and no learning.

The person who becomes bilingual through systematic or structured teaching belongs to the second group.

### 3. Bilingualism vs. Semilingualism

2 L1 means First Language, L2 means Second Language, and subsequently: L2A — second language acquisition. For more detailed analysis of L2A, see Part Two of the present article.

3 There exists a distinction between *social* bilingualism (which can be applied for societies with two or more languages in active use) and *individual* bilingualism.

4 See Suzanne **Romaine**, *Bilingualism*, 1995: 238.

The second component of this antithesis describes the state of a person who suffers from some kind of linguistic deficiency in both languages which is quite common especially in the early stages of bilingualism, when the child spends too little time in either of two language communities (or countries). This happens mainly when both parents are from different countries (cultures, linguistic communities) and are forced to change their place of residence on a frequent basis which does not allow their young children to be immersed as fully as desirable into the cultural and linguistic atmosphere of the country of residence at that time.

**EXAMPLE:**

*"A.B." is the eight-year old daughter of a Cuban father and Russian mother. She was born in Moscow and until the age of two lived with her mother in Russia where she learnt basic Russian. Then the family moved to Cuba for about two years, and the linguistic environment changed completely, because her mother speaks Spanish with native-like fluency and it became their "family language" there "A.B." began to learn Spanish and achieved a certain level of fluency forgetting at the same time the basic vocabulary in Russian. In a rather short period of time the family had to travel between Russia and Cuba several times which affected considerably the child's fluency in both languages as well as her cultural and social competence.*

#### **4. Bilingualism vs. Biculturalism (Multiculturalism)**

Just as a bilingual may have varying degrees of competence in two (or more) languages, he or she may also display different degrees of biculturalism. Normally, we can expect less fluent bilinguals to be less bicultural as well, in the same way as one would predict that a fluent bilingual will be more familiar with both cultures. But it also depends on the way the bilinguals have acquired their languages.

As **Baetens Beardsmore** (1986: 23) remarks: "The further one progresses in bilingual ability, the more important the bicultural element becomes, since higher proficiency increases the expectancy rate of sensitivity towards the cultural implications of language use."

There are some clear examples of when a higher level of biculturalism is accompanied by a lower level of fluency in L2. It was very common for the Soviet *intelligentsia* to have a considerably wide knowledge of cultural issues in other countries, yet to have a low level of proficiency (particularly oral) in foreign languages. One more example taken from the Russian *intelligentsia* will be analysed within the next antithesis:

#### **5. Receptive vs. Productive bilingualism**

A useful distinction can be made between *receptive* (or *passive*) bilingualism, and *productive* (or *active*) competence. The difference here is between those who understand a language –either spoken or written– but cannot produce it themselves, and those who can do both. A receptive competence only has been referred to as *semi-bilingualism*, which was extremely common among the Soviet *intelligentsia*, whose members were able to read fiction and scientific books in English, German or French –the three most studied languages among them–, yet could barely speak a word in any of these languages.

By way of contrast with this phenomenon, I would like to mention the system, very common in Russia prior to and a few years after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, when children from the "nobility" and from families with a high level of income were growing up with a so-called "Гувернёр", "Гувернантка" – "tutor" or "governess" – mainly from France and Germany, and to a lesser extent from Great Britain, who provided the pure native French, German or English to their "барч уқи" – "barin's or master's children" – from their early childhood. It was common for much of the Russian nobility in the 19th century to speak what was supposedly their second language, French, better than their first and supposedly native Russian<sup>5</sup>. This sociocultural phenomenon was clearly reflected in a large number of pages, wholly written in French by Leo Tolstoy in the first chapters of his epic novel "War and Peace" with a subsequent translation into Russian as footnotes.

Nabokov's native fluency in Russian, French and English can be attributed not only to his own talent, but to his tutors and governesses and early age natural second language acquisition<sup>6</sup> as well, which allowed him to become an extraordinary stylist in any of these languages.

## 6. Additive vs. Subtractive bilingualism

In some circumstances the learning of another language represents an expansion of the linguistic repertoire; in others, it may lead to a replacement of the first. Additive bilingualism occurs principally where both languages continue to be useful and valued. Subtractive bilingualism, on the other hand, reflects a society in which one language is valued more than the other(s), where one dominates the other(s). To some extent the example of the Catalan language policy enforced by the Government of Catalonia (one of the Spanish autonomous regions) over the past few decades first recovers the use of the local language (Catalan) whilst at the same time reducing or distancing the official state language which is Castilian Spanish.

On the other hand, the large number of émigré or refugee families (for political or economic reasons) who have settled in the United States want their children to be considered as "Americans" and not "aliens", therefore the use of the "former", native language is in a lot of cases restricted. Cultural and social links with the former "motherland" are reduced to a minimum.

### EXAMPLE:

*"Vl.K-n." Is the seventeen-year old son of an émigré family from the former USSR (Minsk, capital of Belarus). The family left Minsk in the late 70s, when "Vl.K-n." was only six years old. The whole family went to live in the USA with the one desire to forget about all the difficulties, traumas and troubles that they suffered in Soviet Belorussia. Russian or Belorussian were not spoken among their friends or colleagues, and very soon the use of these two languages was lost even within the family because their primary goal was to achieve a native fluency in English. At the age of seventeen "Vl.K-n." hardly remembers essential vocabulary in Russian, but his English is one hundred per cent<sup>7</sup> native*

5 Hugo Baetens Beardsmore (1986:22-23) provides more examples of a similarly educated élite along the centuries: from ancient Rome, with their knowledge of Greek and Latin, through Franco-Russian bilinguals to contemporary Singapore with Mandarin Chinese and English given complementary positive status.

6 He started "acquiring" second and third languages from his early childhood, and the first contact with native speakers as tutors lasted about eight years.

7 There are other, sometimes completely different circumstances even in the same country — the USA. For example, Lowley et al. (1983) describe interviews with representatives from three ethnolinguistic groups within the American society: French, Hispanic and Yiddish. As the authors remark, all three express their desire to maintain their ethnic

Let us now move on to a brief analysis of what is understood by "early" and "late" bilingualism as applied to children.

The terms "early bilingualism" and "child bilingualism" are both used to refer to the child who has been in contact with two languages from birth, and also to the child who acquired a second language in early childhood, but after the first language had already been established.

On the one hand, the terms "early" and "late" bilingualism are sometimes used to refer to *natural* or *primary* bilingualism and to the *artificial*<sup>8</sup>, secondary kind, when someone has *learnt* a second language (in contrast to someone who has *acquired* it under natural conditions). But on the other hand, the original dichotomy of "early" and "late" bilingualism should be seen only as a reflection of the age of the bilingual, i.e. whether the individual becomes bilingual during his or her childhood or as an adult. Late bilingualism may be the result either of L2 acquisition in a natural environment, or the result of second language learning, as with the person who has studied the L2 for years, using graded language-teaching materials, attending courses, etc.

Thus, *late* bilingualism may be of the *natural* or the *artificial* kind, and *early* bilingualism will, in most cases, be of the *natural* kind, especially in the case of the pre-school child.

The most basic difference between "early" and "late" bilingualism lies in the nature of child language acquisition. When the child learns to speak, he or she learns to use language as a means of expression, communication and social contact. The child acquires the formal aspects of a language, its sounds, words, meaning, relationships, grammar. At the same time the child is discovering the world around him, giving names to objects, things, events and processes. In other words, language is an essential ingredient and tool of the child's socialisation process.

First language acquisition differs from all subsequent language acquisition or learning. At this point we might ask:

### **Is early bilingualism "better" than late bilingualism?**

There is a widespread belief that equates child bilingualism with "true" bilingualism: "One fact is clear: whether a person in his future life really masters two languages completely is decided in early childhood. If he does not learn the languages then he will never be completely perfect in both". Two points need to be analysed here:

- first, the idea that the person "will never be completely perfect in both" and:
- second, the idea that children have better language learning abilities than adults.

With regard to the first point, it is unrealistic to suggest that all bilingual speakers achieve complete, 100% mastery or fluency of two languages, in other words *ambilingualism*.

---

identity apart from the new American identity, and all of them consider their mother tongue more vital and visible. (Lowley et al., *Ethnic activists view the ethnic revival and its language consequences: An interview study of 3 American ethnolinguistic minorities*, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 1983, # 4, pp. 237-254).

8 See Part Three of the present article.

**EXAMPLE:**

***"M.S." is Spanish, fluent both in Spanish and Russian, like "H.V.", who is Catalan with the same 100% fluency in three languages: Catalan, Spanish and Russian. Both have lived for several years with their parents in Russia when they were between the age of seven and fifteen and studied in Russian schools. Moreover, their further professional career demands continuous and active maintenance of the native level of fluency in all the languages: both teach Russian as a foreign language at a university level and travel frequently to Russia, working as interpreters and translators, attending linguistic events, and publishing articles and books in Russian.***

The total linguistic repertoire of a fluent bilingual consists of items from both languages, which complement each other and may overlap to varying degrees.

As far as the second point is concerned, it is not possible to find solid proof that children are better than adults at acquiring a second language. One is likely to get the impression that small children achieve fluency in an L2 more quickly than "older" people or learners, but this idea is not supported by hard evidence<sup>9</sup>. The apparent ease with which a child acquires a second language and the greater analytical abilities of the older learner are important factors, which simply cannot be compared<sup>10</sup>.

Although we can establish that there is a fundamental difference between the processes involved in first language acquisition and subsequent language learning, this does not mean that the difference is of either a qualitative or quantitative kind. The only exception may be pronunciation. Children are believed to have greater phonetic and auditory abilities, which enable them to distinguish and reproduce new sounds quite easily, when adults may experience some degree of interference from their L1. This phenomenon can be explained with the following argument: children's articulatory apparatus is growing and developing, and they are able to reproduce any sound, no matter how complex or rare it might be. A certain amount of phonetic interference in a child's bilingual speech may appear when the L2 is acquired slightly after the L1 has been established. An adult's phonetic interference is stronger, but it can also be overcome with special training if the adult learner has the necessary motivation to do so. Unfortunately, universities' foreign language teaching programmes pay too little attention to the phonetic side of languages.

A logical question now arises:

- When does the child lose the ability to learn so quickly?

9 There was even a discussion about the supposed advantages of *early* childhood bilingualism over the *late* childhood bilingualism. Suzanne **Romaine** (1995: 240) states, that "what is 'critical' about second acquisition is not age so much as the circumstances in which it takes place"... She believes that "there are no critical periods in a child's development which are better or worse for language acquisition. Both good and poor levels of performance can be achieved with children of the same age depending on the social context in which learning takes place."

10 "There are some studies which support the claim that early acquisition seems to make for better syntactic ability too, but there are also results indicating that older learners do better. Fathman, for example, compared pronunciation, morphology and grammar among immigrants between the ages of 6 and 15 years and found significantly better pronunciation among the younger children, while the older ones performed better on morphology and grammar." (S. **Romaine**, 1995: 239) So if "older" children with their still limited ability for analysis and synthesis, can perform better on morphological and syntactical levels, why not extend it to adults with their already developed ability for synthesising and analysing?



Some research into the psychological and neurological aspects of language appears to support the idea that there is a "critical period"<sup>11</sup> during which children are particularly adept at acquiring languages. This period was supposed to last from about the second year to the age of puberty. There was said to be a biological link to the development of the brain's dominance of language function through lateralization, i.e. the specialising of one side of the brain, usually the left, in dealing with language<sup>12</sup>. After puberty the brain loses its plasticity, and is therefore no longer specifically receptive for the task.

The theory of the critical period has been reviewed by a number of psycholinguists, and both age limits –*upper* and *lower*– have been called into question again. In the early 1970s it was suggested that lateralization might be complete long before adolescence and possibly essentially complete at birth. The notion of the *critical periods* therefore remains very much a hypothesis. At the same time, however, it is possible that there is a period during which a child has a special ear — a special facility for neuromuscular patterns, i.e., during which he or she finds it particularly easy to acquire any pronunciation skill. What is generally accepted nowadays is that children have certain qualities that favour L2A: they make good mimics, they lack some of the inhibitions that get in the way of many adult language learners, and they have a great capacity for learning by playing. All this can positively influence their fluency and pronunciation. Moreover, children are, in most cases, highly motivated internally to achieve successful L2A.

The age of L2A and of any subsequent language is also important when we analyse its cerebral organisation, i.e. from the cerebral lateralization point of view. The earlier the L2 is acquired the more compact is its cerebral organisation.

### ***Compound bilingualism vs. Co-ordinate bilingualism***

Some specialists in cerebral lateralization and hemispheric dominance as applied to languages consider the age usually before 6-8 years as crucial for *compact* cerebral organisation, whereas later acquisition of an additional language (generally after 10-14 years of age) gives significant reasons to talk about a rather *separated* language organisation (*co-ordinate* bilingualism)<sup>13</sup>. There is no clear time border because of the continuous processes in our brain development and we face some gaps between two different ways of linguistic-cerebral organisation. (Fabbro et al., 1990: 71).

As for the theory that children “*are better bilinguals than adults*” many researchers were impressed by the apparent speed and efficiency with which children acquire language. Thorough investigation of the issue, however, can produce a somewhat different impression, sometimes even a completely contradictory one.

If we suppose that the acquisition process starts at birth or even earlier, which is true, we can claim that children actually spend a long time initially hearing language (during the so-called

11 Short but very up-to-date reviews of "critical period" theories can be found in Cunningham-Andersson U. (1999: 54-55) and especially in Thomas Scovel's (1988) book.

12 Most researchers agree that the first manifestation of cerebral lateralization can be observed in four or five-year old children.

13 There is a view that "a co-ordinate bilingual would make a better interpreter than a compound one on the grounds that a co-ordinate bilingual possesses two cognitive units, one for each translation equivalent", but there is no final evidence "which permits us to conclude that co-ordinate bilinguals might make better translators than compound ones, and vice versa". (J. F. Hamers and M. H. A. Blanc, 1989: 253).

“*passive period*”), before they start using the language actively at around the age of two. Furthermore, to say that language development is completed by the age of five or six is something of an exaggeration. Moreover, the linguistic standards expected from a child are generally much lower and less sophisticated than what it is assumed any adult will achieve and produce.

In fact, it can be maintained quite reasonably that it is the adult who appears to learn fast, swiftly and to master quite a wide range of language skills in relatively little time.

**EXAMPLE:**

*One of the most famous multilinguals, "Kl.", who worked at the Saint-Petersburg State University in 1970s and 1980s, speaks more than thirty languages. He said that it takes him now about two months to learn a new language (if it belongs to a family of languages familiar to him). He taught Dutch, German, French, Danish and English at the St-Petersburg State University, Russia.*

Observation of young language learners can also indicate that children are rather unsophisticated in their learning process, as they lack a number of skills which the older learner usually has, and which can facilitate transfer from one language to another. Children do not normally analytically perceive the similarities between languages, and they are unable to abstract, classify and generalize to the extent that we as adults can. The child may well be linguistically more adept in terms of the acquisition of the phonological system; and certain psychological factors, such as the favourable disposition towards mimicking, playfulness and lack of inhibiting barriers, may facilitate early fluency for them. On the other hand, adults possess a number of very important analytical skills. In view of all this, the successful establishment of bilingualism may well depend on psychological factors, such as attitudes, strong inner motivation and a clear willingness to identify with the speakers of the L2, rather than physiological or biological ones. If this is so, we can apply it both to children and adults.

- How does the “average” child become bilingual?

By growing up in a bilingual environment, would seem to be the obvious answer. But **what constitutes a bilingual environment? Why do some children appear to become bilingual almost spontaneously, while others seem to need some extra help and encouragement?**

## **BILINGUAL PATTERNS**

The ways in which children can become bilingual, and remain bilingual, vary a lot from one family or individual case to another. In this section some commonly found patterns are outlined.

### **1.-IMMIGRATION**

Immigration involves leaving the country of origin in order to settle, once and for all, in a host country. Nations like the United States and Canada have, over the centuries, seen large numbers of immigrants entering their territories. Britain, France, Tsarist Russia (before 1917), Belgium, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands have also seen considerable numbers of immigrants settling in their lands, after the emancipation of their colonies and after global tragedies like the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 or the disintegration of the USSR and “velvet” revolutions in the former socialist

countries of Eastern Europe. The children of immigrants usually acquired their first language at home, from their parents and relatives, and their L2, that of their new country of residence, from people outside the home. The result was usually that, for many generations of immigrants, bilingualism was a transitory stage, lasting only a limited number of years and generations:

<b>first generation</b>	<b>second generation</b>	<b>third generation</b>	<b>fourth generation</b>
<b>LA + LB</b> (+ = “some”)	<b>LA and LB</b>	<b>+LA, LB</b>	<b>LB</b>

## 2.–MIGRATION

Many western European countries experienced large-scale migration in the first three decades after the Second World War, as people moved across frontiers in search of work and better living conditions. This process was repeated in the late 80s and in the 90s after the collapse of the former USSR and the Communist Bloc. In some cases they took their families with them from the outset or sent for them later, in other cases they found partners from the host country or from other ethnic groups. The children of migrants may grow up hearing only the language of their parents, if they live in a community composed mainly of migrants of homogeneous origin, and their contact with the second language may not begin in earnest until they are of school age.

Migration is seen as involving temporary movement only, whereby they contemplate an eventual return to the country of origin. For migrants it is therefore important to maintain their language, but by the same token the host country may feel relieved of any obligation to make special educational provision for their children, with respect to both distinct second language programmes and mother-tongue teaching.

Here I would like to mention bi- or multilingualism in the former USSR, where so-called “mass” or “popular” bilingualism was widely developed. In that country of more than one hundred nations and languages, the Russian language was officially “proclaimed” as “*the language of multinational communication*” by the Soviet central government. People from distant Soviet republics were able to communicate amongst themselves using one official language — Russian, which was studied in almost every school across the largest country in the world. At the same time, semi-lingualism was also highly represented in the former Soviet republics, mainly in the former Baltic soviet republics (Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia) and the Asian part of the country (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). The reasons for such semi-lingualism in different regions differ considerably and yet also have a lot in common. In the Baltic republics there was a strong cultural — and consequently linguistic — opposition to “Russification”, while in the Asian part of the country the majority of the population were just living in remote rural villages where it was technically difficult and in a lot of cases unnecessary to enforce Russian.

## 3.–CLOSE CONTACT WITH OTHER LINGUISTIC GROUPS

In some multinational states or countries with rich linguistic diversity, contact between members of different language groups is quite common. The children may have parents or relatives who speak different languages, or they may hear one language at home and another one outside it.

#### 4.–SCHOOLING

Nowadays education can play a very important role in attempts to make our children bilingual. One of the clear examples of what one school can do for bilingual education comes in the shape of the CLV — Concordia Language Villages Summer Immersion Programme, which combines the school model of teaching and all the advantages provided by immersion into the target language environment. You can consult their programme on the Internet.

#### 5.–GROWING UP IN A BILINGUAL FAMILY

At the family level there are many different strategies to choose from for bringing children up bilingually.

The degree of success will depend mainly on such factors as:

- whether the parents are consistent in their language use and stimulate their child to become bilingual;
- whether the child has enough exposure to the “home only” use of the language;
- whether he or she perceives the need and motivation to use both languages, and
- whether he or she receives the right kind and amount of social and family support outside and inside the family.

Providing the first two conditions, *consistency* and *exposure*, are met, the establishment of bilingualism within the family is not usually problematic.

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1984: 75-80) suggests a classification of the world’s bilinguals based on the following factors:

- pressure to become bilingual;
- the prerequisites for bilingualism;
- the route by which the individual has become bilingual, and
- the consequences entailed in failing to become bilingual.

She identifies 4 groups as follows:

##### ***1. Élite bilinguals***

These are people who have freely chosen to become so (for example, because they want to work or study abroad), and children who belong to families who change their country of residence relatively often and/or who are sent to be educated abroad. In all of these cases, two languages (L1 and L2) receive wide social support and the mother tongue, in particular, enjoys a firm and stable position. The L2 may have been learnt or acquired (either “artificially” or “naturally”). Children who live temporarily in a different linguistic environment may feel a greater need to learn the language of the host country (L2) in order to make social contacts or be able to follow the school curriculum. Their attempt to make progress in the second language will usually be met with, at the very least, friendly approval, and they will confidently expect that one day they will return to the country of their mother tongue.

This is indeed the case with regard to my two sons, who went with me to Cuba in the late 80s, where I had been working as an interpreter and translator for the Russian Economic Mission. They acquired Spanish from their everyday environment (kindergarten, school, playground) and their L2 (Cuban Spanish) received plenty of family support because both parents are Russian-Spanish bilinguals. They also received social support from the Cuban side encouraging them to learn Spanish, which was spoken even within the family when we received Spanish-speaking visitors. Russian was spoken only when we were alone (which was not very often). As a result of these sociolinguistic “circumstances” both boys (six and three years old when they arrived in Cuba) acquired Spanish extremely quickly and in a totally natural way, and became almost complete bilinguals (based on comparable standards of linguistic fluency for children of the same age) by the time they left the host country, when they were seven and five years old). They are still bilingual and have not lost their L2, Spanish (due to other circumstances).

### ***2. Children from linguistic majorities***

These are children who learn another language (e.g. that of a minority group) at school, such as in immersion programmes (see above a note on CLV) or in foreign language classes. The learning of the L2 may be considered advantageous either because it is seen as a way of enhancing the prestige of the minority language (as with French in some regions in Canada) or because it is believed to be of wider educational or vocational benefit, than, for instance, English or Spanish as a foreign language in many countries.

The children in the above two groups tend to come from monolingual backgrounds, as opposed to the following two examples:

### ***3. Children from bilingual families***

These are children whose parents have different mother tongues. The child will experience considerable pressure from society to become fluent in the official language, but there will be no external compulsion to become bilingual. Bilingualism will be desirable because there are internal family pressures requiring the child to communicate in the language of the parent(s). The emotional relationship between the child(ren) and the parent(s) may suffer somewhat if bilingualism does not develop. But for the child’s educational success and complete social integration the only important and relevant thing is that he or she acquires the language of the country. The consequences of failure to become bilingual may possibly be problematic within the family, but not too serious in society.

### ***4. Children from linguistic minorities***

These children have parents who belong to a linguistic minority, and they are under intensive external pressure to learn the language spoken by the majority. The risk of failing in the attempt to become bilingual is greater than for any of the above groups.

**Part two****SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING (ACQUISITION) — L2A  
PRINCIPLES AND QUESTIONS**

In the modern world, Spanish, French, British and American monolinguals, for example, often complain that they have no aptitude for foreign language learning. All such complaints and prejudices reveal more about social convention than about anything else. What is the real situation with L2A in the modern western world?

It may be useful to divide L2A here into two broad categories:

**simultaneous and successive**

The first, simultaneous, describes exposure to more than one variety from the onset of speech or, at least, from a very young age (some commentators have suggested age three or four as a rather arbitrary cut-off) as opposed to the second, successive, — at a later age. Age margins are unclear in both cases because of the continuous process of cerebral formation which cannot be established once and for all for all children.

**"ONE LANGUAGE — ONE PERSON"**

The following principle "*one language – one person*" (or "*one environment – one language*") has been used by all the commentators as one of the most important requisites for successful L2A. In spite of such broad recognition of the role this principle plays, there are some cases that contradict it.

Suzanne **Romaine** (1995: 183-205) offers her synthesised typology of bilingual-acquisition possibilities, which in my opinion summarises the most common viewpoints on this issue:

***Type 1: one person – one language***

Parents have different native languages, but each has some competence in the other's variety, the *community* language is one of the parental varieties, and the strategy is for parents to each speak their own language to the child.

(Example: English-speaking mother, Russian-speaking father, each using their own language, bringing up the child in England.)

***Type 2: non-dominant home language/one language – one environment***

The same as above, except that the strategy here is for both parents to speak to the child in the language **not** dominant in the community. The assumption is that the child will necessarily acquire the dominant community language because of extra-domestic pressure, at nursery, kindergarten, playground, school, etc.

(Example: English-native-speaking bilingual <English-Russian> mother, Russian-speaking father, both using Russian at home, in England.)

***Type 3: non-dominant home language without community support***

In this case both parents have the same language which is not, however, dominant in the community. The strategy is obviously for the two of them to use their native language with the child.

(Example: Russian spoken by both parents in England.)

***Type 4: double non-dominant home language without community support***

Each parent has a different native language, neither of which is dominant outside the home. Each speaks their own language to the child.

(Example: German spoken by the mother, Russian by the father, each using their own language, in England.)

***Type 5: non-native parents***

Parents have the same native language, which is also dominant in the community. However, one parent (mainly a professional linguist) always talks to the child in a non-native language.

(Example: the father and the mother are both native Russian speakers, but father speaks English to the child, in Russia.)

***Type 6: mixed languages***

Parents are bilingual, the community may also be bilingual, and each parent switches and mixes languages with the child.

(Example: French/English bilingual parents in Montreal, Canada or Catalan/Spanish bilingual parents in Barcelona, Spain.)

### **Risks and Dangers**

There is evidence, for all these scenarios, that bringing up children bilingually need not involve any risks. Where negative consequences or unhappiness have been observed it usually has much more to do with social, personal, cultural or other factors than with the process itself of becoming bilingual.

Some studies, recently carried out in Sweden, raise the question concerning several major risks in children's L2A (see Greg **Wright**, 1997). In fact, it is still not absolutely clear even to the researchers, where the problem has its roots. Summarising the danger and risks that can be provoked by *unstable* child bilingualism (when the child is still *becoming* bilingual), it is possible to divide them into four large groups:

- when the child is pressed by his or her parents to cultivate a new language and become bilingual; to this specific danger some researchers add one more condition: *before the mother tongue is fully mastered*;
- when the child has been exposed to two languages, usually within a period of eighteen to twenty four months: Swedish researchers say that such exposure can have dire consequences;
- in early childhood, when important concept-forming stages are taking place, bilingualism itself or exposure to bilingual situations could confuse children's thinking, and
- children's psychological and, consequently, linguistic instability as a result of internal family conflicts between parents.

A more pragmatic person would, perhaps, say: "Let it all happen naturally and just do not force!" Jean Marc Trouille from the University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, my colleague, bilingual himself and a father of bilingual children says: "It seems to be a problem of consistency. A child notices if a language is spoken naturally or not. Above all, the child must be in an environment where he's loved very much by his parents. If there are conflicts between the couple it creates dangers"<sup>14</sup>. From this point of view, the problem of risks becomes more and more social rather than purely linguistic or physiological.

But most observers point to the advantages of any early-acquired bilingual competence. These tend to reflect, above all, the relative ease of early learning and the higher levels of fluency, vocabulary and so on. There are some controversies as to *when* in early life it is best to set in train bilingualism. From birth? From the age of three? From the start of primary school? But generally, most researchers agree that early childhood is the best time to begin acquiring a second language, particularly and especially, perhaps, for native-like pronunciation ability<sup>15</sup>.

In the process of becoming bilingual, native aptitude, age and intelligence are less important than a supportive context of necessity. With the right social conditions, then, bilingualism becomes just as "natural" as monolingualism in others, and is a capacity available and accessible to anyone of normal or standard talents and abilities.

It should be stressed again that, with sufficient *motivation* and *opportunity*, all normally intelligent people can learn another language; those who claim they are "no good" at foreign languages are usually lacking in one or both of these. This is not to deny that there may exist individuals who have a greater innate or acquired aptitude – a "good ear" may be helpful, as well as a good memory and a capacity for self-initiated application and training or learning. Beyond these, adaptability and genuine interest in other cultures are no doubt important and significant in any case. It can be seen, though, that virtually all of these qualities are of general value and do not form a package specifically directed at second language learning (as you can see, first language acquisition always happens *naturally* and in earliest childhood with or without motivation and "*special*" opportunities).

---

14 Quoted from the article by Greg **Wright** "Warning: Mind your languages", Yorkshire Post, November 10, 1997.

15 See, for example, what Hugo **Baetens Beardsmore** states (1986: 33): "Many specialists have demonstrated the positive aspects of early bilingualism, ... particularly with respect to the acquisition of a flawless, native like accent and intonation patterns in more than one language".



## Motivation

Theories within social psychology have paid particular attention to motivational features, and this makes a good deal of sense. If we agree that language is a social activity, and if we accept that almost everyone is cognitively capable of acquiring or learning second (and subsequent) varieties, then it follows that the pressure of the situation and the attitudes it provokes in potential learners are central.

### **instrumental vs. integrative motivation**

The first refers to a desire to learn for utilitarian purposes. The second refers to language learning as part of the following potential factors:

- the desire to know more about other cultures;
- in order to interact with other cultures, and
- to immerse oneself in another culture.

### **bilingualism vs. IQ (intelligence)**

Some of the difficulties involved in attempting to show a relationship –*positive* or *negative*– between bilingualism and cognitive development, mental flexibility, intelligence and so on, involve such questions, as:

- How do we adequately define bilingualism itself? Do we require perfectly balanced bilinguals in order to bring out the “best” contrast with monolinguals?
- How do we define “intelligence” itself? How do we know that IQ tests adequately measure the “intelligence”? Can we trust IQ tests in general?
- How do we ensure comparability between groups of bilinguals and monolinguals? Taking into account age, gender and other variables, like the starting age of schooling, may not be very difficult, but what about socio-economic status and conditions, like the amount of interest in learning and availability of good libraries, that cannot be measured with such precision as all the above-mentioned factors?
- How do we interpret any relationship and interdependence found between bilingualism and intelligence? Does bilingualism lead to an increase in IQ in individuals or does a higher individual IQ increase the likelihood of functional bilingualism?
- Does the acquisition of any further (third, fourth, etc.) language facilitate the raising of one's IQ? And if this is so, is there any limit of IQ for polyglots who speak more than ten or perhaps twenty languages?

Early studies of the problem in question tended to associate bilingualism with lowered intelligence, and it is unsurprising that many of them were conducted in North America, at a time of great concern with the flood of immigrants from Europe (in the period 1900-1920). The story of the intelligence testing movement itself, which flourished at this time, is a fascinating one, as well as being an example of the misuse of “science” allied to ignorance and prejudice.

In addition to the negative associations made between bilingualism and intelligence which stemmed, somewhat indirectly, from social fears of immigrants, there were more objective studies carried out which pointed to a number of real problems. Later research tended to show essentially no direct relationship between intelligence and bilingualism. It is worth mentioning that these investigations were generally more carefully and accurately formulated, conducted and, in some

sense, measured than the earlier studies. Keeping a record of gender, age and social class differences became a common procedure, and the lack of such control was increasingly seen to have produced the negative associations and conclusions found and formulated in previous works.

What some have seen as a turning point came in the early 1960s, when findings showing a positive relationship between intelligence and bilingualism began to appear. A study conducted by Elizabeth **Peal** and Wallace **Lambert**, in Montreal in 1962, controlled more carefully the relevant variables in an examination of ten-year-old bilingual and monolingual children.

The authors concluded that the bilingual child had "mental flexibility, a superiority in concept formation and a more diversified set of mental abilities". However, they also noted that "it is not possible to state from the present study whether the more intelligent child became bilingual or whether bilingualism aided his intellectual development".

### Part three

#### BILINGUALISM AS A PROCESS STAGES, PHASES AND QUESTIONS

Before we move on to bilingualism as a *process*, it is first necessary to analyse briefly the following anithesis:

##### **complete (absolute) vs. incomplete bilingualism**

The first –*complete* or *absolute* bilingualism– undoubtedly describes bilingualism where the fluency and competence in both languages are of native standard. The second one –*incomplete* bilingualism– may represent several stages of fluency, but at the same time some aspects, like phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, syntax etc., can be improved.

There are two different ways of achieving *complete* bilingualism: *artificial* and *natural*. The first means that the L2A runs by study, and the L2 is learnt in a kind of “*artificial*” environment: school, language courses, self-study etc. Normally “*artificial*” L2A starts after the age of seven, when the child –and later adult– is able to acquire the second language by means of any kind of study. Historically, *artificial* bilingualism became common practice around the time of the Middle Ages, with the extensive appearance of schools and universities.

It is necessary to underline here that the *artificial* way of L2A gives rise to the question of so-called "language *abilities* or *capacities*". At the same time, nobody questions the human capacity and ability to acquire the mother tongue (L1). One can conclude that the real cause of bad L2A lies not in a lack of certain "language abilities" but in something else, when L2 itself is not a means or tool, but is the aim.

*Natural* L2A means that the second language is acquired without special studies, for example, in a bilingual family. With the natural way of establishing bilingualism or polylingualism (and the total number of languages is irrelevant) the native fluency in L2 becomes essential and vital because the individual needs to come into contact with other language speakers. L2 itself in such a case is not an aim or goal, but a kind of a tool or means to enter into contact and establish communication. L2A is realised directly in the L2 linguistic environment through direct contact with native speakers who produce repeatedly different "models" to be copied by the new member of the "community". Furthermore, the L2 is acquired through performing a common activity or action, such as playing, cooking or washing.

The central figure for *artificial* L2 acquisition is a *language teacher* who may lack the native fluency in the foreign (or L2) language, and the new tongue is learnt far from the required language environment. Second language exposure is short and limited by the margins of a "lesson" which is a far cry from the real practical activity characteristic of the natural way of acquisition.

*Natural* acquisition is characterised by a greater tolerance towards the errors made by the learner because the attention is focused on the message or content (*what* was said) and not on the form (*how* it was said). In school the attention is focused on the errors (which creates additional troubles, difficulties and psychological barriers for learners) and the sanction or punishment for these kinds of mistakes is represented in the form of lower or bad marks or credits.

### Language Interference

With the *natural* way of L2A the learner is acquainted with the second culture, customs, *realia* and traditions, while the *artificial* (school) way simply does not provide enough time and means to ensure that this occurs. The inter-language interference in that case is unilateral: from the mother tongue towards the L2 only. In the case of the natural process interference occurs in both directions.

### elemental (spontaneous) vs. conscious process of establishing bilingualism

Both *natural* and *artificial* ways of acquiring L2 can be *elemental* and *conscious*. *Elemental* (*spontaneous*) means that there is no external control over the process or guidance from parents or specialists. Even the *artificial* way of acquiring L2 can be considered *elemental* or *spontaneous*, when the teacher lacks a clear structure and scheme of the course, when his own level of fluency in L2 is not sufficient, when he lacks motivation and energy to put into his teaching, affecting at the same time his students' or pupils' motivation and diligence.

To ask the question as to *which one of these two –natural or artificial– is better* is incorrect, but at the same time each presents certain advantages over the other.

*Advantages<sup>16</sup> of natural bilingualism:*

- both languages (L1 and L2) are more stable grammatically than in the case of artificial bilingualism, especially if the second language is not used for a significant time;
- one of the languages needs or requires more time to be “forgotten”;
- at the phonetic and phonological levels either language is, again, more stable and provides the native fluency in both, and
- native fluency acquired in a natural environment is better for the career of the professional translator (because of the “time-factor”: translators have enough and almost unlimited time to “convert” the written message in L1 into the equivalent message in the L2 or vice versa, which gives them plenty of room to perceive the whole message in the first language, analyse it, compare it with the draft translation and to produce the requested message in the second language in its final version).

*Disadvantages of natural bilingualism over artificial bilingualism:*

- it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to change the phonetic accent if the L2 was acquired from a specific dialect environment (for example: Mexican or Cuban accent in Spanish when the bilingual English-Spanish or French-Spanish person is currently living in Spain);
- it is difficult and sometimes impossible to eliminate the dialect vocabulary if the L2 was acquired from a specific dialect environment (for example: a Colombian or Dominican accent in Spanish when the bilingual English-Spanish or French-Spanish person is living in Spain);
- it is difficult and sometimes impossible to eliminate the dialect grammar patterns and models typical of one specific dialect or country (for example: the Castilian Spanish form “vosotros” <“you” plural *informal*> plus the whole verbal paradigm that corresponds to the second person in plural is ignored in most Spanish speaking Latin American countries. This form has been substituted by “ustedes” <“you” plural> with its correspondent 3rd person plural paradigm, which also exists in peninsular Spanish, but its lexical meaning is different: “you”, formal and respectful)<sup>17</sup>, and
- a bilingual person with native fluency in both languages acquired naturally and especially in early childhood needs, sometimes, more specific training as an interpreter (no clear advantage over the bilingual interpreter with the L2 studied in an artificial environment<sup>18</sup>)

It is necessary to provide some reasons for such a statement. Generally speaking, each language is “stored” in a specific place or zone in the right and left hemispheres without establishing specific links between both languages, as in the case of natural acquisition. L2 artificial acquisition (study) requires necessarily the establishment of such specific links whilst learning new vocabulary, grammar rules, idiomatic expressions etc., an experience which is absolutely essential for any interpreter, to be able to switch between languages on a conscious level<sup>19</sup>.

16 "If most scholars agree that a certain level of bilinguality is a prerequisite for translation and interpretation, — state J. F. Hamers and M. H. A. Blanc (1989: 253), — no conclusions can yet be drawn concerning the fact that one type of bilingual might be more suitable to perform these tasks. Only a few speculations have been expressed but there is an evident lack of empirical evidence to support any of them." All the below considerations about “advantages” and “disadvantages” are based on my own experience teaching “natural” and “artificial” bilinguals.

17 Another similar example from Spanish American dialects: (Argentinian, Uruguayan, etc.) “vos” and “voseo”: the use of the pronoun “vos” plus Plural instead of the Castilian “tú” + Singular. According to my own observations, Latin American emigrants after decades living in Spain (where they settle down in their adulthood) still preserve their local phonetic features, idioms and can hardly use the Castilian verbal grammar structure (tenses and paradigms) that differs from their own (native) dialects.

18 This is due perhaps to the difference between co-ordinate and compound bilingualism. See footnote 10.

*Advantages of artificial bilingualism over natural bilingualism:*

- it is easier to change the accent (requires a modicum of motivation and diligence);
- it is easier to replace dialect, (or regional) words and expressions with the standard ones when moving to another country or region, and
- generally, bilinguals with a studied L2 are better as interpreters (because of the same "time factor": interpreters, especially those who do simultaneous interpreting, are under constant time pressure. Both languages in their heads have to be inter-linked in a special way. Such kind of links are necessarily established in the *artificial* mode of L2A that widely uses translation as a method of teaching. *Natural* L2 acquisition keeps both languages stored "*independently*" in our heads.

*Disadvantages of artificial bilingualism compared with natural bilingualism:*

- grammar and vocabulary are less stable if the L2 is not used for a certain period of time;
- a bilingual loses his or her ability to produce the fluent speech and starts to translate mentally if the L2 has not been used for a certain period of time;
- second "*artificially acquired*" language is less stable phonetically if it has not been used for a certain period of time, and
- if certain grammatical rules are incorrectly understood, learnt and mastered during the process of learning or study, it is extremely difficult to correct them later (natural L2A completely ignores these difficulties because the future bilingual is always exposed only to the native models produced by native speakers).

In any case, both types of bilingualism, once established, require continuous hard work in order to be maintained at a high level, which means that the bilingual person needs to use both languages all the time: to read, speak, write and listen all require training if he or she does not want to lose the language later on, because bilingualism in fact is not something we can obtain once and for all. It is always a *dynamic process*, in which it is possible to observe and distinguish some stages or phases:

- **establishment** of bilingualism, when the potential or future bilingual is still acquiring (by a natural way or learning by an artificial way) the second language;
- **established or stable** bilingualism, when an individual is already undoubtedly bilingual;
- **the process of losing** bilingualism, when an individual is forgetting or using less and less L2, for instance, when he or she has to abandon the bilingual environment (temporarily or permanently), and
- **lost** bilingualism, when a former bilingual has already lost his fluency in one of the two languages, for instance, when he or she due to extralinguistic factors has already left the bilingual environment.

19 As Lynn Visson states (1999: xix-xx), "contrary to what most people think, many interpreters are not bilingual [from their childhood — *pk*], and many bilinguals [who acquired their L2 in early or late childhood, but in childhood nevertheless — *pk*] are incapable of simultaneous interpretation. Some bilinguals cannot interpret the simplest of conversations. "Most people believe that if you are bilingual, you can interpret," commented an official of the Administrative Office of the US Courts, a frequent user of interpreters. "That's about as true as saying that if you have two hands, you can automatically be a concert pianist." The chief of the interpreting division in the State Department Office of Language Services remarked to an interviewer, "Every day people walk in here who are totally bilingual — and are totally incapable of interpreting... They just can't do it." This is, perhaps, not a scientific, but rather an "applied", "practical" or "pragmatic" view and "verdict".

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1984: 215) states, that "there are many bilinguals who complain that they find translation [interpreting — *pk*] very difficult... It is also clear that translation and interpretation at a high level are abilities that require special training. Simultaneous and successive [consecutive — *pk*] interpretation even requires regular practice... The teaching at school is also important. If one of the bilingual's languages is taught as a second or foreign language while the other is the language of instruction, the child will probably get a good deal of practice at translation [interpreting — *pk*]."

## THE PROCESS OF LOSING BILINGUALISM IN A BILINGUAL PERSON

There are some basic factors and causes that can provoke the loss of bilingualism already established in a bilingual person. The first group can be called "*sociolinguistic*" which may include:

- Changes in linguistic or social conditions and personal circumstances, such as:
  - the family leaving the country or region where bilingualism had been practised, and.
  - the bilingual person graduating from university, college or school and getting a job or starting new studies without L2.
- Changes in the status of the L2 (which becomes less prestigious), like in Catalonia where the use of Castilian Spanish is becoming less and less popular in favour of Catalan, or in some regions of Canada, where the same process works against English and in favour of French.

The second group can be called "*physiological causes*", which may include:

- external causes, like the death of a parent or relative with whom the L2 was spoken, and
- internal causes, for example a cerebral physiological trauma, that provokes aphasia (after a car crash), or stroke or other disabilities.

### **What is the first thing to be lost? How does this process progress?**

First of all, the correct use of idioms and set phrases suffers and they are substituted by *calques* in L2.

Secondly, a large number of directly borrowed words from L1 appears, like "let's have some ensalada <"salad" in Spanish> with *aceitunas negras*" <"black olives" in Spanish>.

Thirdly, phonetically correct pronunciation in L2 suffers considerable interference from the first language.

### **Are those changes irreversible? Can the process of losing bilingualism be stopped or even slowed down?**

The answer is positively "yes" if the former bilingual person (and specifically child, as we are analysing childrens' bilingualism) is able to read in L2. Of course, reading by itself cannot prevent partial loss of fluency in L2, but at the same time it does help to slow down the destructive process and to maintain the language (L2, even in its passive form) active and vivid in a child's brain.

## CONCLUSIONS

I would like finally to answer some of the questions posed by myself in this article:

**Is it possible to achieve fluency if you start studying at a late age? That is, when you are in your late teens, or in your twenties and beyond?**

I think that if you start late it is still possible to reach a decent (or very high) level of fluency in the target language, but almost everything depends on the following factors:

- self- motivation** (without it you cannot achieve good results in any field of activity);
- how much time** you spend *learning* the second language, because if you do not have enough time, you will be unable to learn properly;
- the teaching methodology** which is used, taking into consideration all your specific characteristics as a student:
  - **which hemisphere is dominant** in your cerebrum (if, for example, you are *left* hemisphere dominant -<"logical">- you will probably need less time to start talking than other *right* hemisphere students <"artists">, but if you do not work very hard you will lose all the advantages in a short period, during which time your "rivals" will catch up with you and overtake you, presenting the best results on any level);
  - **how it corresponds to (co-ordinates with) the teaching methodology** applied by the language teacher or instructor; for example: if you teach oral Russian (conversation) or Russian practical grammar in a mixed group, where students from China, Japan, South Korea are mixed with, say, North Americans or Norwegians, you can easily recognise that according to their perception and the way they "learn" the second –in my case the Russian– language, they are divided into two big groups: the "*Oriental*" model and the "*Western*" model, each one requiring its own approach to the teaching and presentation of the same material. For example: students belonging to the "*Oriental*" model prefer to receive and understand the new material and grammar rules presented in the form of tables and diagrams.
  - **where do your strengths lie**: in reading, writing, speaking or listening; in *executive* tasks or *creative*?. If you like reading, for example, and you hate writing, but the teacher offers more written tasks than reading, you will be under stress almost all of the time, and the final result, perhaps, will be lower than expected. But if both student and teacher work together, the achievable result will be higher than in the first case.
- previous learning experience** in other contexts and subjects (if you do not have any language acquisition experience);
- previous teaching and working (with languages) experience**:

### EXAMPLE 1:

*"A.B.", 63, from Switzerland came for the first time to St-Petersburg as a tourist. She liked the city and decided to take the short intensive introductory course in Russian. She speaks English, French, Italian, German, Spanish fluently. Since retiring she felt as if she had grown much older and so decided to take on a new challenge: to learn Russian. Her progress in "active" elements, like spoken skills, is not at a very high level, but at the same time her "passive" skills, like readding and understanding are already on a very high level especially because of her previous language exposure.*

**EXAMPLE 2:**

*"M.L.", French, 36, 12 years of teaching French as a second Language for the Alliance Française. In 1 year studying Russian Ab Initio in St-Petersburg he managed to complete the programme which traditionally requires 2 or more years.*

–**learning capacity and the ability of your memory** (if you have a well-trained memory, it goes without saying that you will be able to memorise more vocabulary in less time); we have to take into account that child's memory is like an empty receptacle and its capacity still has no limits: the more you put there now the more you will be able to put there later. When you are an "adult", the capacity of your brain and memory is still unlimited, but the mechanisms of acquisition and learning, selecting, processing and "digesting" the new material are established, are fixed, are "fossilised" in some sense. If you think that you are unable to learn foreign languages, a prejudice, which is so common among us and which is absolutely ignored by all children, will make it difficult for you to learn fast.

The theme of psychological barriers and how to cope with them in teaching foreign languages deserves a separate article.

–**hobbies** (do you like music, dance, etc?), because if you hate singing and hate poetry in general, you will hate memorising songs and poems in the new second language. But sometimes, the strangest thing happens: if you have enough inner motivation to study the second language and you do not like singing in your own language, but you like the group, you like the place where you are studying and you are enjoying yourself, it is not impossible for you to start liking singing (and it happens sometimes);

–**do you like playing games** in general (in order to be able to learn while doing role-plays)?

For children it is essential to learn while playing. As for us, adults, it depends on our disposition to take part in role-games and on many other factors too.

**When does the optimum period for acquisition of the second language occur?**

Early on, but it is never too late to start. As I see it, the optimum period we can find falls between the early years and twenty three to twenty five, the age when you have to establish or define your place in society, when you start working and making money to maintain yourself or your family. Until this age you have more free time, more opportunities to travel etc.

**What are the mechanisms of the L2 acquisition process so characteristic for children that we as adults can borrow directly from them when learning a second language? Is it possible to copy the natural process of learning when we are studying as adults?**

–On the one hand, the process of second language acquisition is not as rapid as we imagine it. For example, if a boy or girl "learns" the second language (starts to speak "fluently" on the childish level) in 6 months, and he or she is only 5 years old, it means, that



–excluding the first year of his or her life (a "silent period")– it required one-eighth of the child's life so far to do so. If we project the same figures to adults, for example to a student who is 21, it means that this same period of acquisition will now be 30 months, or 2 and a half years. If someone starts at 33 this same period will thus be almost 4 years. At what pace do our children learn the second language? Can we learn at the same speed? I think so. I am an optimist.

On the other hand, children's acquisition of a second language (or first or third, for that matter) is characterised by an enormous amount of repetition: any mother, grandmother, father, or any parent or relative starts talking to the baby using very simple vocabulary and repeating again and again the same words and phrases, songs and poems over a period of time. The repetition becomes essential not only at the level of perception, but at the level of reproduction as well: the baby tries again and again to articulate new sounds, groups of sounds, words and simple phrases. The "adult" children (usually between three and seven years of age), when they are learning the second language in an immersion context, do the same during their games in the playground with other children, or by talking to their other-language- speaking relatives. Traditionally, it is the "grandmas" who play the main role with their patience, knowledge of stories, fairy-tales (full of repetition), songs and poems.

For us as adults, the most important thing we can adopt is the patience both in learning and in teaching, and moreover the understanding of the great role of any folklore and games (role-plays).

The next point to be mentioned is the *lack of evaluation*, which is extremely important for the comfortable acquisition of any new knowledge.

–And another very valuable ability to be borrowed is the sense of rhythm, which appears throughout the same traditional folklore poems, songs, stories. Of course, we do not have enough time to repeat the children's model of acquisition in miniature, but the scheme itself works, and works productively. Instead of some "childish" poems we can introduce more "interesting" material for our students, but they have to *learn by heart* a lot of versified texts, for several reasons:

- the rhythm provides us with a certain kind of "easy mechanism" to learn by heart, and the rhyme does the same;
- each language has its own rhythmic and rhyme models, so learning songs and poems makes it easier for us to feel the original aroma of the language, not to mention the acquisition of the vocabulary in its content, and
- we can introduce at any stage in the learning process a number of "*tongue twisters*" in order to improve phonetics. We appreciate children's ability to imitate any different or difficult sound, but we forget that they pass through a lot of repetition, which we can substitute with self-training using tongue twisters, for example.

### **How can the child in different circumstances start to be bilingual?**

It depends, first of all, on the motivation of the student and the prestige and the difficulty of the language. Secondly, it depends on the period of time one is immersed in the second language

environment (if we are talking about the natural process of acquisition). Thirdly, it depends on the cultural level of all those who are involved in this complicated process. If the level is high, the second language is deeper and will remain with the child for a longer period.

### **Does any bilingual person necessarily become a perfect interpreter and translator?**

No, not necessarily. If someone is bilingual (with a "natural" way of L2A), but does not have enough practice or training in interpreting, the professional interpreter (with the "artificial" way of L2A) may do the same work considerably better and more precisely. The phenomenon consists of the different patterns kept in our brain (hemispheres) and in order to be a good interpreter we need to establish efficient inter-communication (inter-correspondence) between two or more languages. What is characteristic of an interpreter, as Josiane F. **Hamers** and Michel H.A. **Blanc** state (1989: 245), is not his or her bilinguality, which often includes native-like competence in several languages, as much as his or her **ability** *decode a message* in the source language while *simultaneously re-encoding it* in the target language. This is a matter of some special training and also years of experience. BUT: fluent bilinguality is, indeed, a necessary pre-requisite for both professions: translator and interpreter.

#### *AUTHOR'S NOTE:*

*If you are interested in this specific theme –bilingualism in children– and search through electronic catalogues, you will find that there is a wealth of material available. In my article I have tried to **synthesize** the main ideas, streams, criteria, classifications, remarks and views. For this reason I have not provided an extended bibliography to this article, since the space required by a simple list of sources and recommended books and articles would occupy nearly the same space as the present publication.*

*Author*

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- APPEL René, MUYSKEN Pieter (1987) *Language Contact and Bilingualism*. Edward Arnold Ltd. London.
- BEARDSMORE Baetens Hugo (1986) *Bilingualism: Basic Principles*. Second Edition, Ed. Multilingual Matters Ltd., England.
- BLOOMFIELD Leonard (1935) *Language*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- CORBALLIS, M.C. (1980) "Laterality and Myth". In://*American Psychologist*, N35, pp. 284-295.
- CUNNINGHAM-ANDERSSON Una, Andersson Staffan (1999) *Growing Up with two languages: A practical guide*. Routledge, London and New York.

- FABBRO Franco, GRAN Laura, BASSO G. BAVA A. (1990) "Cerebral Lateralization in Simultaneous Interpretation" in://*Brain and Language*, N39, pp. 69-89.
- HAMERS Josiane F., BLANC Michel H.A. (1989) *Bilinguality and Bilingualism*. Cambridge University Press.
- LOWLEY et al. (1983) "Ethnic activists view the ethnic revival and its language consequences: An interview study of 3 American ethnolinguistic minorities". In://*Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, # 4, pp. 237-254.
- MACKEY William F. (1956) "Toward a definition of Bilingualism". In://*Journal of the Canadian Linguistic Association*, March.
- MACKEY William F. (1957) "The Description of Bilingualism:" in://*Journal of the Canadian Linguistic Association*.
- MITCHELL Rosamond, Myles Florence (1998) *Second Language Learning Theories*. Arnold.
- NIKITIN Boris Pavlovitch (1969) "Gipoteza voznikovenija i razvitija tvorcheskix sposobnostej". In://*Sociologicheskie i ekonomicheskie problemy obrazovanija*, Novosibirsk, Ed. Nauka, pp. 78-124 (in Russian).
- PEAL Elizabeth, Lambert Wallace E. (1962) "Relation of Bilingualism to Intelligence". In://*Psychological Monographs*, 76, pp. 1-23.
- ROMAINE Suzanne (1984) *The Language of Children and Adolescents. The Acquisition of Communicative Competence*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- ROMAINE Suzanne (1995) *Bilingualism*, Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- SCOVEL Thomas (1988) *A Time to Speak: A Psycholinguistic Inquiry into the Critical Period for Human Speech*. New York: Newbury House/Harper and Row.
- SKUTNABB-KANGAS Tove (1984) *Bilingualism or Not: The Education of Minorities*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters 7.
- VISSON Lynn (1999) *From Russian into English: An Introduction to Simultaneous Interpretation*, Second Edition, Focus Publishing, R. Pullins and Company, Newburyport MA, USA.
- WEINREICH Uriel W. (1968) *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*. Mouton Publishers, The Hague.