



Beyond parental child-directed strategies - How important is the knowledge of the partners language?

Nadine Sette & Marina Hüppop

We examine the factors that can foster active bi- and trilingualism in the first stages of early language acquisition. We deal with the internal as well as the external factors that can influence active early bi- and trilingualism in different societal settings in terms of impact of the minority/majority language(s). In particular, the parental strategies seem to have an important influence.

The fact that the children become actively multilingual despite reduced amount of input shows that not only input quantity can be decisive, but that qualitative factors are also important for multilingual development. One important qualitative factor is the speaking habit of the parents.

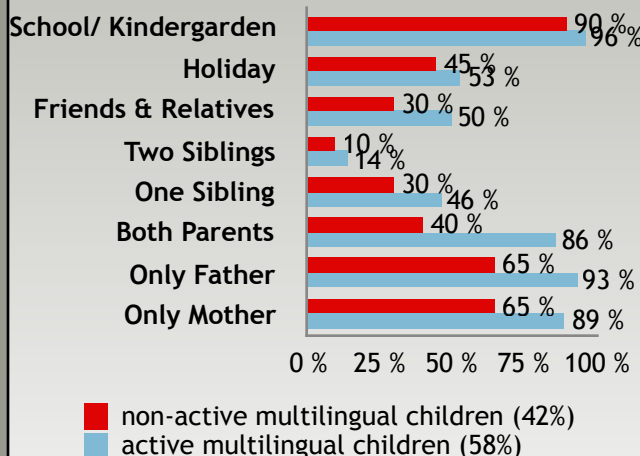
De Houwer (2007) states that active bilingualism requires knowledge of the MiL (minority language) by both parents if at most one parent also uses the MaL (majority language). Consequently, it is more likely that a child becomes actively bilingual if both parents speak (and understand) the MiL. De Houwer (2004) further states that active trilingualism is fostered if each parent also understands the respective other MiLs (i.e. also the mother tongue of the partner).

METHODS

- Cross-sectional-study, bi- & trilingual children, German, French, Spanish and Catalan
- Operationalization of the linguistic competence through the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test*
- Operationalization of the influencing factors through a parental questionnaire

DEFINITIONS

- As “active” bi- and trilingual we define children who reached for all tested languages at least an IQ value of 85 (=average).



Promotion on the part of the family seems decisive for active vocabulary competence in the MiL(s). 86% of actively multilingual children were able to address both parents in the MiL. It can therefore be concluded that active bi- and trilingualism are promoted when both parents are able to speak the MiL (this does not imply that both must be native speakers). Consequently, we can confirm the assumption of De Houwer (2007) that it is beneficial for active bi- and trilingualism that both parents speak the MiL. Overall, the results clearly show that attending a bilingual school alone does not lead to active multilingualism, but family factors (e.g parental strategies) and family support are decisive.

References:

- De Houwer, A. (2004). Trilingual input and children's language use in trilingual families in Flanders. In C. Hoffmann, & J. Ytsma (Eds.), *Trilingualism in Family, School and Community*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 118-135.
- De Houwer, A. (2007). Parental language input patterns and children's bilingual use. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 28, pp. 411-424.
- Sette, N., M. Hüppop & L. Arnaus Gil (2018). Active bi- and trilingualism and its influencing factors. Manuscript, Bergische Universität Wuppertal. (subm.).



Language dominance in bi-, tri- and multilingual children – How to measure? Abira Sivakumar

Language dominance and language proficiency are two different concepts often confounded in the literature on early child bi- and trilingualism. Language dominance refers to the unequal status of the languages in the child during a particular developmental stage; it says nothing about the child's proficiency attained in the languages in comparison to a multilingual norm. The terms “dominant language(s)” and “weak language(s)” are used to refer to an unbalanced bi- or trilingualism.

More categories are needed in early child trilingualism to characterize the relation of the languages to each other.

Three degrees of language balance exist in trilingual children: 1) In analogy to bilingual children, the relation between the languages can be either balanced in all three languages ($A = B = C$) or 2) unbalanced ($A \neq B \neq C$). 3) In contrast to bilingual children, only two of the languages in a trilingual child can be similar ($A = B \neq C$); languages A and B can be balanced ($A = B$) or unbalanced ($A \neq C$; $B \neq C$). The present study refers to this possibility as “(un)balanced with two languages”.

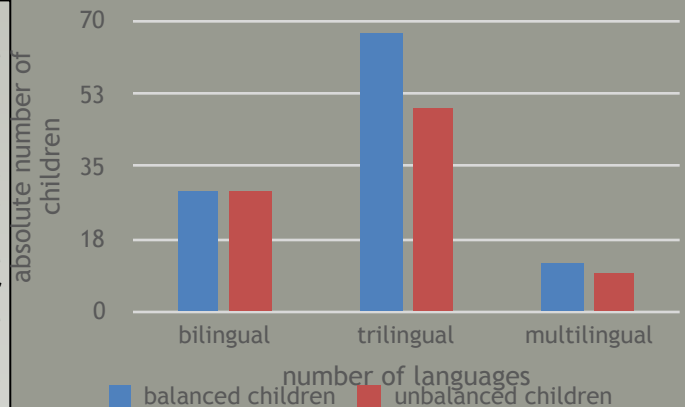
METHODS

- Cross-sectional-study, 126 bi-, tri- and multilingual children, German, French, Spanish and Catalan
- Operationalization of the linguistic competence through the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test*

DEFINITIONS

- Based on the IQ-scale with a mean interval (“average”) of 85 to 115 points and a standard deviation of 15 points.
- IQ-points below 70 = “extremely low”
- IQ-points 70 - 85 = “moderately low”
- IQ-points 85 - 100 = “low average”
- IQ-points 100 - 115 = “high average”
- IQ-points 115 - 130 = “moderately high”
- IQ-points above 130 = “extremely high”

The sample contains a nearly equal amount of balanced and unbalanced children.



The method applies to longitudinal data and to other measures, like the size of the verb lexicon.

The level reached in language A in comparison to languages B and C is either average (= 33,3%), below average (< 33,3%) or above average (> 33,3%), with a deviation of 11,11% between the subcategories. Diego is raised trilingually with French, Italian and Spanish in France (2;8-4;2).

Sivakumar-Thiyagarajah, A. (2017). *Die soziolinguistischen Faktoren des Code-Switching bei trilingual aufwachsenden Kindern: Eine empirische Untersuchung eines trilingual spanisch-französisch-italienisch aufwachsenden Kindes*. Master's thesis, BUW.

Sivakumar, A., N. Müller & L. Arnaus Gil (2018). Die Entwicklung des rezeptiven Wortschatzes bei bi-, tri- und multilingual aufwachsenden Kindern. Submitted.

Sivakumar, A., N. Müller & L. Arnaus Gil (2018). Acquiring three languages from birth: It does matter. In: P. Guijarro Fuentes & C. Suarez (Eds.) *New Trends in Language Acquisition within the Generative Perspective*. Springer. Submitted.