

Bilingualism perspectives in Kazakhstan

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Bilingual children have the capacity to develop new language more naturally than do adults. Children who learn more than one language before adolescence, will acquire those languages with more ease and "native-like" ability than they would trying to study those languages as adults. Most adults who began to seriously study a second language for the first time in junior high, high school or later, look at bilingual children with envy, realizing that even years of laborious study are not likely to render them "equal" or "balanced" bilinguals. It is true that many bilingual children are not balanced bilinguals, using each of their languages with equal ability, since assuring that they have equal exposure to both languages is quite a task--sometimes an impossible task - or the parents. However, bilingual children do acquire their dominant language (or both their languages if neither is dominant) to an ability equal of that of their monolingual peers.

Additionally, they acquire a piece of a second language, generally learning far more of that language far more quickly than an adult could. How well a bilingual child develops their second language can vary from a child who only knows a few phrases and some very basic vocabulary in a second language, to a child who listens and understands, but cannot or perhaps will not speak, to a balanced bilingual child who communicates in both languages with the same command as monolingual peers in both languages. Whether a bilingual child is just dipping their toe into a second language, or actually swimming in it, that child is experiencing to some degree the richness of another language. Children that are exposed to more than one language, even if they never fully learn that language as children, have a higher capacity for foreign language learning as teens or adults. Just playing foreign language cassettes in the home, and trying to speak whatever you know of a second language to your infants and young children will help their minds expand linguistically in a way that will give them an educational advantage later.

Learning two languages allows children to stretching their understanding of people beyond their dominant culture. Being able to step into another culture through its language is like being able to live a second life. Although some bilingual children do not have a lot of exposure to the culture of their second language, the language itself conveys much of the culture of the people who speak that language. Further, even if children are not living with native speakers of their second language (who are fully a part of the culture associated with the child's second language) in their house or community, they are still likely to be exposed to original songs and stories from that culture.

Bilingual children have some experience seeing how different cultures cause different people to interpret completely differently the exact same

circumstance. Seeing two different cultures internally helps bilingual children realize that much of what is considered universal human behavior within a culture may be unique to that culture. This awareness and understanding of differences between people prepares children to reserve judgment when they see someone respond "inappropriately" to a situation.

Bilingual children not only better appreciate what is human versus what is cultural, but they are also more inclined to have a deeper appreciation of language. They understand at an early age that there is more than one way to label or discuss something. They understand that different labels for the same object or idea in different languages can have different connotations. They are more likely to see the creative possibilities of language and explore:

- Linguistic creativity.
 - a) Your kids get exposure to another culture. So rather than thinking there is only one way to everything, they stay open, open to possibilities. How fabulous is that? They know from the start that different people do things differently. And that's OK. It's not better, it's not worse, it's just different.
 - b) Bilingual children build bridges to new relationships because they have the capability: they can talk to diverse people, they build different sorts of relationships, and they can be the bridge between two kids who can't talk to each other - they can actually translate and help out.
 - c) There are also potential economic advantages, of course. Later in life when your child finishes school, with a second language he/she will be more in demand. We live in an ever smaller world where languages are the only barrier, distances are no longer. So if your child speaks a second or third one, there's a clear economic advantage.
 - d) Another advantage is the more flexible and divergent thinking. Researches actually show that kids who grow up with several languages think differently. They know from the start that there could be more than one word to one concept. So their mind stays more flexible and that often also led to the fact that bilingual children do at least as well in school as their monolingual counterparts, if not - and some studies have shown that - even better. Just because their flexible or more divergent thinking skills.
 - e) The self-identity of your child will be affected as well. Your child will see her or him as a language or culture bridge. It's not only that they just are this bridge, they actually conscious about it. And that is even more than doing it. It is about who your child is, the self-image your child adopts. And that means that bilingualism actually affects the child, it's not just about communication, it's not just about functional benefits. It's actually about the personality, about who your child is. It increases, as a result, the self-esteem and the self-confidence. [1; 154]

- Communication advantages:

Wider communication – bilinguals can communicate with extended family, community, and international links. Bilinguals may also be bridge builders between different languages.

- Cultural advantages:

Broader enculturation, "deep multiculturalism" and two language worlds of experience; two windows on the world! It seems likely that bilinguals would be more tolerant of difference and diversity and less likely to be racist but this is yet to be scientifically tested.

- Cognitive advantages:

In tests that measure creative thinking or divergent thinking bilinguals regularly score higher i.e. they think of more uses than monolinguals. Bilinguals seem to think more freely, more elaborately and more creatively.

- Curriculum advantages:

a) Increased curriculum achievement – bilingual children do better at school – this may result from multiple factors e.g. higher self esteem, creative thinking, a wider worldview. Also possible if homework discussed with a parent in another language may lead to deeper understanding of content as opposed to reciting.

b) Bilinguals find it easier to learn a third language than monolinguals find it to learn a second language – two thirds of studies show this result, the other third could find no difference. It is not yet known why this should be – it could be down to higher confidence [2; 79].

c) Bilingualism helps to learn a third language.

Due to expanding technology, our world has become a much smaller community. We are now encountering more people with diverse backgrounds and languages. Many people are now speaking languages other than their native tongue. It used to be common to speak two languages but now speaking a third language is becoming popular.

It has been discovered that those who are bilingual are better able to learn a third language. A third language learner is a person who has already acquired two languages and is learning a third one.

Bilingual people who are learning a third language can learn more easily, obtain better scoring on oral and written tests, understand instructions and answer questions more successfully, more likely to be involved in classroom activities, more attentive in class, are more enthusiastic about learning, and pronounce words more accurately and clearly.

Those who are bilingual and are learning a third language have been found to have a better understanding of how the third language works because they can draw distinctions between the other two languages. They are able to identify the similarities regarding grammar, spelling, vocabulary, as well as identify similar words, phrases and sentence structures. They are also able to quickly and easily understand the various language rules. They are also more likely to practice the third language outside of the classroom because their self-confidence is boosted. Those who have a native language that is similar to the language they are learning are able to learn the new language at a faster rate [3; 21].

In order to fit in to a new environment, some native speakers may be less likely to use their native language. We have found that those who obtain a third language are often more confident and enthusiastic with achieving a higher education. Bilingual third language learners are more likely to start using their own native language outside of their homes and in places where their language is not

commonly spoken. They feel more confident when speaking so they start to enjoy it and speak more often. Their self esteem is boosted making them more successful in other parts of their life. They become motivated to learn new things.

There are many benefits to learning a third language. Because language is the principal communication tool, the more languages one learns the more valuable they become in terms of their career. Professionals with several languages are more likely to travel for their work.

Mastering a third language will improve opportunities in such as areas as government, business, health care, law enforcement, teaching, technology, the military, social services, and many other industries. Obtaining a third language will open up many new doors to success.

Children fluent in two languages have certain cognitive advantages compared to those who speak only one. They are better at problem solving, demonstrate greater creativity, and express more tolerant attitudes toward others, for instance. If children are going to benefit from these cognitive advantages, they must use both languages regularly. Parents and other child care providers should understand that if they want infants and toddlers to benefit cognitively from knowing two languages, they should be serious and committed to raising children bilingually." It is also important that dual language learning starts early because infants and toddlers are particularly adept at learning languages.

Significantly, simultaneous bilingual children go through the basic milestones in language acquisitions as children who learn only one language. These children do so at the same rate as monolingual children, provided they are given adequate learning environments. Bilingual children begin to babble at the same age as monolingual children. They say their first words at the same age and start to produce multiword sentences at the same age as well.

Many people assume that infants and toddlers can become confused by exposure to two languages, however as long as most people in the child's family, community, and child care facility use one language at a time, the child will learn that this is the appropriate way to use the two languages. Most bilingual children keep their languages separate most of the time. When they mix, it is often to fill gaps in their vocabulary in one or the other language. Mixed does not mean that children are confused or impaired; they are simply using all of their language resources to express themselves [4; 167].

Simultaneous bilingual learners have approximately half as much exposure to each language as monolingual learners; they display the same basic developmental patterns at approximately the same ages as their monolingual counterparts. On the flip side of this, it is commonly thought that children with language impairment should learn just one language as learning two could result in even greater impairments and delays by exceeding their language learning capacity. Though there is very little research on dual language learning by children with SLI, Genesee explains how research evidence that is available suggests that children with language impairment can become bilingual [5; 463].

Difference between monolinguals and bilinguals is metalinguistic awareness. Metalinguistic awareness is thought to be acquired differently in

monolinguals and bilinguals. Metalinguistic awareness includes the awareness of the form of language, such as the awareness of sounds (phonological awareness), grammatical “rules” (syntactic awareness) and grammatical markers (morphological awareness). Some studies have shown that bilingualism enhances metalinguistic ability. However, evidence that supports a bilingual advantage for the acquisition of phonological awareness is not consistent, with some studies showing no differences between monolinguals and bilinguals and other studies showing this advantage for bilinguals [6;65].

When group differences do occur, they tend to disappear by first grade. In addition, these relationships may depend on the degree of similarity between languages and the degree of consistency within a language. One study found higher levels of English phonological awareness for Kazakh-English speakers in comparison to Kazakh-Russian-English speakers.

Our research conducted on learning to read English as a third language extends these differences in literacy skills that have been found between monolinguals and bilinguals. For example, we have found that children who had proficiency in two languages (Kazakh and Russian) and were learning English as a third language, outperformed children with less proficiency in these two languages and also outperformed monolingual children who were learning English only as an L2 on measures of phonological awareness.

There are a lot of advantages and good reasons to tackle multilingualism or bilingualism for your child. But to be complete, we should have a look into disadvantages:

- Your child might start speaking three to six months later than a monolingual child. But it's important to know that you need to give your child those extra three to six months. Beyond that, if your child doesn't start speaking three to six months after what is expected for monolingual children, you do exactly the same that you would do with a monolingual child: you consult a specialist and you figure out what the cause is. It might be the same cause as for monolingual children, there might be hearing problems, and there might be all sorts of problems. So you figure out the exact problem and you solve it.
- Another potential disadvantage is the temporary mixing of languages. Yes, your child might mix up different words from different languages into one sentence. This is absolutely normal until the age of four. It is a difference and not so much a disadvantage. If you know that that's to be expected you won't even see it as a disadvantage.
- Added academic load. Most likely your child will go to a monolingual school. Some have the advantage to go to a bilingual school, but the majority of children, even though they grow up bilingual or multilingual, they still go to a monolingual school. This means that if you also want your child to read and write in their second or third or fourth language, you'll have to find a way to add that to your child's curriculum. So that means extra hours, extra work in the afternoons after the normal regular school. And that has to be organized and that is an effort that your child has to put in and yourself.

- Although much evidence suggests that bilingual children are not intellectually disadvantaged from their monolingual peers, it is possible for bilingual children to not develop adequately enough either of the two languages they are learning to be able to be an effective student at school in either language. This is most likely to happen in a scenario where the child doesn't have enough exposure to their preferred language (probably the dominant language of the community) since his or her parents do not use and may not know that language, and the child resists speaking the language that is spoken at home. It is avoidable.
- You may be looked down upon by those who think it's odd to know more than one language.
- You may have to deal with bigotry more than most.
- You may not have a true sense of identity and feel you don't really belong to any one culture.
- There may be friction in your family should you reject one culture for the other, or just be more interested in the culture of where you live
- You might mix up your languages when you speak or think.
- Bilingual people usually are either better at one language, or worse at the other, or they might not be able to fully grasp both.

Some studies raise the question concerning several major risks in children's L2A. 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

Thus, 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.

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