Children’s Second Language Acquisition

A Case Study of Bilingual Children in Iceland

B. A. Thesis

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Abstract

A growing number of multicultural societies emerged from increased population movements and globalization. As a result, the quantity of multilingual families and bilinguals are growing every year. Language acquisition is always difficult, but it becomes even more complex in the case of bilingualism. This thesis aims on early bilinguals, a term used for describing bilingual individuals that have achieved both their L1 and L2 from birth and maintain active use of both languages on daily basis.

This study consists of two parts—a practical one and a methodological one. Section two and three comprise the methodological part. Section two provides a theoretical summary of the various aspects of the concept of bilingualism, even though there is no comprehensive definition for the term since bilingualism may mean different things to different people.

Several studies that have compared the performance of early bilinguals and monolinguals and the outcomes of early bilingual’s cognitive development are presented. In the third section I explore the positive and negative impact as well the age frame on child’s cognitive development. The fast development of bilingual studies in the 20th century is discussed as well.

Section four is a practical part, which contains my fieldwork with bilingual families living in Iceland, consisting of four interviews with parents of bilingual children. My work evaluated the language usage of children from four bilingual families. I focused on each child’s home language practice to explore ways to influence and improve language skills. No comparison has been made with native Icelandic children.

In order to collect data for my research I constructed a questionnaire for parents of bilingual children. The collected data was structured, analyzed and presented in conclusions. However, the findings are tentative and improvements so far at this phase are necessary in further additional development.

Key words: bilingualism, bilingual, cognitive development, balanced bilinguals, early bilinguals, positive influence of bilingualism, psychological and sociocultural factors.
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1 Introduction

Language has always been a key to human’s communication. In the Cambridge Dictionary, language is defined as words and sounds combinations used by people to communicate, or in a social sense, a communication system adopted in appropriate country or activity (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d). Benjamin defines language as an any verbal expression of thought. Some people acquire not only one, but a few languages and these people are called bilinguals. According to different sources it is estimated 40 to 50 percent of the world’s population is bilingual (Bialystok, 2017).

The past few decades have been a time of rapid social and cultural changes worldwide. Today multiculturalism is becoming a dominant feature of modern life in many countries. Basis of a multicultural society become families that unite people of different nationalities, cultures and languages. The development and successful learning of bilingual children depends on his or her linguistic environment. Among other important components of this environment, language contacts between the child and the parent are studied (see e. g. Cunningham-Andersson and Andersson, 1999).

A child begins to learn a language from birth, and it will take him or her many years to master it to a sufficient level. In cases when child learn two languages, the learning process becomes more difficult. The successful development of a child in a multicultural environment is a subject of a serious debate. Expanding the boundaries of language proficiency consists of both improvements in the first language (L1), often referred to as the prior language, the child’s second language (L2), and a balanced connection between two languages.

In the early 20th century, bilingualism was seen harmful to children’s language development. After Peal and Lambert’s research had been published in 1962, the negative views began to change (Hakuta and Diaz, 1985). There are a number of researches who discovered that bilingual children have advantages over their monolingual peers due to the positive effect of bilingualism on cognitive abilities (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson and Ungerleider, 2010).

This thesis is aimed to investigate the various views of bilingualism and the meanings of these aspects to bilinguals. The development of bilingual studies in the 20th century discussed as well. The tasks of this research are to find, study and analyze options for bilingual language practice; choose appropriate survey methods for research and find criteria for the correct assessment of bilingualism.

This work concentrated on the study of early bilinguals, that is, children who reached the L1 and L2 levels in early childhood and use both languages in everyday life. The idea that bilingual advantages might arise very early, even before any speech production starts, is one of the main themes of this research.
Moreover, this study contains my field work of bilingual families and their children living in Iceland. A questionnaire for the parents was constructed, and I visited them at home to observe their home environment and language interactions. This was the process I followed in order to collect data for my research. I presented each phase of the process of my work, analyzed results and interpreted them.

Finally, the concluding discussion summarizes the paper’s overall results.
2 Bilingualism

There is no comprehensive definition for the term *bilingualism* because the term could be interpreted in many ways. Baetens-Baerdemaeker claimed that bilingualism has flexible semantics (seen in Baker, 2011). The term is a disputable issue between linguists. In the Cambridge Dictionary, bilingualism is defined as an ability to use both languages at sufficient level. Bloomfield (1935), Macmara (1967), Baker (1993; 2003; 2011), Kangas (1981), Hamers and Blanc (2000), Grosjean (1982), Tritone (1972) (seen in Hamers and Blanc, 2000), Skutnabb- and many other linguists and researchers introduces their definitions of bilingualism.

Bilingualism is combined word, both parts derived from Latin. *Bi* - translate as *double*, *lingua* is *language*. In other words, bilingualism precisely is obtaining two languages. Tritone (1972) (seen in Hamers and Blanc, 2000) identify the phenomena as a person’s ability to express himself or herself in a second language avoiding paraphrasing his or her first language. Bilingualism can refer to individuals, to an entire society or to scientific research of the phenomena. Multilingualism and polyglotism may be used as synonyms for the term bilingualism.

Bialystok (2001) describes bilingual as a person that can speak two languages and easily embrace sociocultural attitude of both languages. Okurinmeta (2013) presented the dimensions of bilingualism as a language reality where the person achieve proficiency in minimum two languages. Furthermore, Baumgart and Billick (2017) stated that bilingualism is classifies as proportionate competence in two languages that person use most of their life.

Cummins’s threshold hypothesis (2000) got a broad acknowledgment and pays an important role in a later research. Professor divided bilinguals into: *semilinguals, dominant bilinguals* and *balanced bilinguals*.

- *Semilinguals* are individuals with a low level of proficiency in L1 and L2, lacking for adequate communication.
- *Dominant bilinguals* use one language more than the other so establish more competence in one of their languages accordingly.
- *Balanced bilinguals* refer to individuals that have accomplished great proficiency in both their languages.

This thesis concentrates on all three levels of bilingualism.
3 Age frame in bilingual development

Tokuhama-Espinosa (2000) claimed that first seven years of child’s life form their neuroconnections which will be foundation for entire forthcoming education. Age is a critical aspect in language acquisition. Eight to eleven years old is a particular age frame where a child is capable of acquiring two or more languages effortlessly (Chomsky, 1957, 1959) (seen in Peregoy, Boyle and Cadiero-Kaplan, 2008). By children researchers understand all young individuals in diapason from birth until around eleven years old. Roughly speaking the age of eleven is a period of time when end of the critical period meets beginning of puberty. At the time of critical period, children are more open and capable to learn language with a native-like fluency (Bialystok, 2001).

Hamers and Blanc claimed that important aspect of language learning is sociocultural, cognitive and linguistic progress (1989). Linguists categorize early and late bilingualism. As a rule of thumb, the acquisition of the first language develops in the family, and the development of a second language is in school. Late bilinguals are usually individuals that have high level in L1 and obtain L2 after critical period of 11 years of age (Hamers and Blanc, 1989).

Linguistic competence is differentiated between early and late bilinguals. Late bilinguals are often not equally proficient in L1 and L2. On the other hand, early bilinguals are usually able to reach near-native language proficiency. McLaughlin (1995) disagreed with this assertion when he introduced another misinterpretation of individuals that acquire second language. The linguist claimed that children are able to obtain L2 faster than adults by reason of social, psychological and sociocultural factors and because of the need or/and desire to blend into a new community (McLaughlin, 1995). As a rule, children have more motivation and desire to improve their second language, because it is their language of communication with the peers. As a result, children aged between three to seven, who attend kindergarten or primary school acquire L2 faster than their L1 (Scheele, 2010), in contrast with working adults, which are often among people or colleagues which speak L1 (McLaughlin, 1995). McLaughlin (1995) in his study proves that some grown-ups can achieve greater results in L2 learning than children. Moreover, McLaughlin claims that children have the capacity to speak the second language without any accent, which is impossible for adults to achieve. Asher and Garcia (1969) and Oyama (1976) (seen in McLaughlin, 1995), share the same opinion, as they suggested that younger children have higher chance to acquire native-like accent in L2 than adults.

Early bilingualism or early bilinguals is a phenomenon that describes individuals that obtain knowledge of two languages from birth (Luk, De Sa and Bialystok, 2011). Hamers and Blanc (1989) divided bilingualism in two types: (A) simultaneous early or infant bilinguality and (B) consecutive childhood bilinguality. Type A includes children born in a multilingual family
who have mastered good bilingual practice before adolescence. Type B are children who acquire basic linguistic skills in their first language and after that, acquire a second language.

Bilingualism is a term that defines a person who began to speak two languages on sufficient level from a very early age. Research on bilingualism today uses criteria for age of second language acquisition, duration of second language proficiency, and degree of second language acquisition. Thus, Luk, De Sa and Bialystok in 2011 divided 123 university students into three groups—monolinguals, early bilinguals or late bilinguals. Researchers divided people according to the age of the beginning of speaking and fluency in the language. The monolingual group included thirty-eight students communicate in English fluently. Forty-three early bilinguals, from second group, stated that they began actively speaking both languages before the age of ten. Forty-two late bilinguals from third group reported that they began actively speaking both languages after the approximate age of ten. Scientists evaluated the efficiency of the three groups in the flanker test. The results showed similarities between late bilinguals and monolinguals, and early bilinguals demonstrated less test interference than their monolingual counterparts. In conclusion, the researchers determined that the onset age of bilingualism it is not the age of obtaining a second language, but the age of active daily use of two languages.

Experienced bilinguals are persons that acquire both languages from childhood and adopt both of languages to their adult daily life. Furthermore, in contemporary research, special attention is paid to age of acquisition, usage reasons and type of context in which the language is used.

This work has concentrated on early bilinguals, individuals that use their majority and minority languages proportionally on a daily basis, so, on balanced bilinguals.

3.1 Positive influence of bilingualism
This section explored the positive impact of bilingualism and analyzes contemporary studies which indicate that bilingualism has a positive effect on a child’s linguistic and cognitive development (Baker, 2011; Bialystok, 2001).

Grosjean (2010) insists that caring and competent parents who understand the importance of bilingualism, should guide and help their children to dig in into another language and culture. Only then can it become an exciting game and useful journey for the children. With this approach, children develop trust in their parents and it is not difficult for them to share their impressions, experiences, failures and problems.

In 1913, Ronjat was one of the first to make a report about bilingualism and it was not until 49 years later that the Canadian researchers Peal and Lambert conducted a progressive research in 1962. Their research proved a positive effect on children’s cognition caused by bilingualism and
marked a beginning for a more positive outlook on this dispute (seen in Hakuta and Diaz, 1985). These linguists examined and matched bilingual and monolingual participants in terms of socioeconomic status, gender, age, language experience and language proficiency. Their research found that bilingualism did not have any negative impact on cognitive function. Moreover, the advantages of bilinguals over monolinguals in terms of cognition have been repeatedly demonstrated (Baker, 2003; 2011). Finally, the results of their study pointed out that bilinguals had outperformed monolinguals on several verbal and non-verbal intelligence measures when they showed better results on 15 out of 18 variables measuring IQ (Baker, 2011, p.44).

In addition, the researchers concluded that bilingualism has positive effect on a flexible mind and shows improvements of abstract thinking (Baker, 2011). After 1962 many researchers such as Ianco-Worrall (1972) and Bialystok (1986, 1999, 2001) carried out further surveys that indicate the positive effect of bilingualism on a child’s cognition. Carlson and Meltzoff (2008) research showed the best results of bilinguals versus monolinguals when solving problems that required control of conflicting attention requests.

In a mean time, both groups presented similar results on delay tasks control (Carlson and Meltzoff, 2008). Deák defines flexible cognition as a changing formation of understanding, modification of representations or responses based on information taken from both linguistic and non-linguistic field. When there are multiple options to acknowledge a problem and react to it, flexible thinkers choose models that limit that range. The selected attitudes vary according to requirements. The environment creates new problems and circumstances, the cognitive focus shifts to new, more relevant circumstances (Deák, 2003).

Hakuta and Diaz (1985) believe that bilinguals acquire greater cognitive flexibility due to their ability to switch between two languages. In addition, Hamers and Blanc declare that the child’s competence to switch between two linguistic systems increased metalinguistic perception and leads to comprehensive cognitive flexibility. All obtained results promote the declaration that bilingual children have higher cognitive flexibility than their monolingual peers.

Each social aspect of a study has both positive and negative effects. Therefore, after having examined the positive effects of bilingualism on cognitive and language development, the negative effects should also be carefully considered, so I discussed it in the next section below.
3.2 Negative influence of bilingualism

Research that shows negative impact of bilingualism on a child is less extensive than research that shows positive influence, but still it is worth to mention some of it. Much of the research on bilingualism in the earlier part of the 20th century had negative attitude towards bilingual education and presented the phenomenon as a potential negative impact for children’s language progress. Moreover, bilinguals were seen as underachievers. Some research asserted that bilingualism can be harmful for child’s progress (Baker, 2011).

Numerous research are based on psychometric tests of intelligence or IQ (Baker, 2003; 2011). At that time, it was a common belief that second language would not benefit a child. Much empirical research proved this statement. Even so, the results of this research are not valid considering its methodological weaknesses.

In massive study of 1,700 children aged three to ten years old the passive vocabulary of the English language was tested. The study showed that bilingual participants had lower results than monolingual members. However, at the same time, professor argues that bilingual children obtained the same or even wider combined vocabulary scattered between two languages and have similar communicative ability than their monolingual peers (Bialystok, 2010).

Hamers and Blanc (2000) claim that bilinguals obviously have poorer vocabulary than monolinguals, because monolinguals use only one language. Linguists refer that it is important to accept that monolinguals and bilinguals are different regarding to language input they obtain. Child require to use from forty until sixty per cent of each language, to be able to establish a stabilized type of bilingualism, where the child maintains same proficiency in both languages. At the same time, evidence has shown that the bilingual vocabulary is not less than of a monolingual, with the condition that two languages would be taken into account.

Most researchers that worked before the 1960s concluded that learning a second language is harmful to children and leads to cognitive dissonances. However, a study by Pintner in 1932, showed contradictive results of testing children. The study involved English-speaking and non-English-speaking children from three different schools. The results of language and non-language testing were compared. A group of non-English speaking children did not use English at home. In first school monolinguals demonstrated higher results than bilinguals, in second school bilinguals were better than monolinguals, and there was no difference between the groups in the third school. The conflicting findings of Pintner's work confirm that there were no clear and convincing conclusions about the harmfulness of bilingualism at that time.

Modern authors have argued that negative conclusions were based on studies with weak methodology. Valdez and Figueroa (1994) (seen in Baker, 2011) noted that bilingual children were tested in their weaker language, so they did not perform well on the IQ test. All tests were
conducted in English only. As a result, bilingual children failed the IQ test because they were tested in their weaker language. The research subjects of such works at the beginning of the 20th century varied in terms of their language competence, gender, socioeconomic status, types of schools attended, and this was the main methodological problem (Baker, 2011). Baker, Vice Chancellor of the University of Wales and author of books and articles on bilingual education, argues that the concept of intelligence is amorphous. These are different types of intelligence, such as social, musical, political, etc. Therefore, one IQ test is not enough to measure such different forms of intelligence. Early research was based on monolinguals with higher socioeconomic status than bilinguals (Baker, 2011). Bialystok (2001) insists that both groups should be the same in all conditions and all deviations should be eliminated if possible.

Over the time, in the early 20th century, the term bilingualism changed its meaning and the problem of bilingualism became wider part of linguistic research. With time, negative scientific attitude towards bilingualism was transformed into a positive, due to the fact that the phenomenon of bilingualism began to be considered using correct methodological tools and receiving new reliable data.
4 Research / Interviews with families

4.1 Fieldwork

Fieldwork preparation consisted of constructing a questionnaire and seeking out participants for the study by advertising it publicly online. All applicants were assessed, in total only 9, which were fewer than expected. To achieve clear results from a study is optimal to have large data pool with few variables, in most cases. Otherwise there is a risk that a single participant can offset the results greatly. I noticed 4 out of those 9 had very similar family structure and the other 5 families were very different from each other. Having the applicant pool so small, I decided to eliminate as many variables as possible and narrow down the research by studying these 4 families that have very similar structure. I contacted the ones I thought met the criteria for the study and set up a meeting in their homes. The fieldwork at participants homes included semi-structured interviews with the parents and a verbal assessment of the child’s language abilities.

4.2 Main study

In this part I described forms and methods of investigation. In my work I used the method of semi-structured interviews with parents of four bilingual children to determine their achievements and successes in everyday life. In effort to minimize variables in study participants I chose participants with similar family structure. All the families are parents with an only child, a boy, age 4 to 9 years old and one parent is Icelander, the other a foreigner. I did research on four bilingual families that live in Iceland. All families that I studied have a very different socio-economic status, education, origins and socio-cultural background. I asked parents to answer 29 questions, which I tried to construct in a way to provide short and simple answers, avoiding open interpretation of the data. The questions concern who is speaking which language, in which environment, and when children start to learn each language. In my opinion this could be important information to see the difference in language acquisition. My plan was to see what parenting methods works best. At the time of the interviews the children were from 4 to 9 years old. In all cases all private information that could help identify them or their families have been removed.

By interviewing the parents of bilingual children, I wanted to identify what methods parents use and how their approaches may differ. I examined each child’s home language practice to explore ways to influence and improve language skills. I analyzed the quality and quantity of each parent’s input to child’s language development. No comparison has been made with native Icelandic children. In my research I decided not to use typical tests. After reading about methods of assessment tests, I realized the high risk of receiving negative results of bilinguals compared to monolinguals.
Assessment tests, as Baker writes, exaggerate vocabulary deficits or imperfection in second language knowledge. This creates strong opinion about linguistic inconsistency of bilinguals and the impossibility of the equal language level between linguistic minorities and majority (Baker, 2000). In other words, bilingual children would probably show worse results than their monolingual peers or be recognized as “incompetent speakers in each of the languages” (Jessner, 2008, p. 15).

4.3 Confidential issues

Participants’ anonymity was provided. The names of children, parents, and information that could help identify them or their families have been removed. The data were not published in open sources and only the author of the study had access to them.

4.4 Description of participants

Minority languages spoken in the families participating in the research are not specified for confidentiality reasons. Instead, second language or L2 is used in answers, as well as the name of country switched to home country or homeland. Possible biases were taken into account in the process of selection of participants for the correct interpretation of information.

Indeed, as Lichtman (2006) stated that the researcher initiates and moderates the learning process, accumulates and passes all information through himself. At any moment of work, this information transforms the initial attitudes of the researcher, his interpretations and attitude towards the research itself. Such changes can lead to the fact that the researcher changes questions, methods of obtaining information, etc.

Furthermore, I understood that it is difficult for young children to answer open-ended questions. Their inaccurate or incomprehensible answers can influence interpretations of results. Scheele (2010) when described this problem, wrote that three-year-old children find it difficult to assess their progress in language acquisition and can not explain it.

I based my questionnaire on the study from 2016 by Beck and made my changes and additions to it. In the questionnaire, I concentrated on the language activities that parents tend to do with their children (reading, listening, communicating in particular) in order to see quantity and quality of language interaction that children receive in their home environment. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix A.
The next step in my research was to study the answers obtained from the parents in response to questionnaire. Four families that live in Iceland became subjects of my study. In all four families the mother and the father are of different nationality, and in order to keep this information private, nationality is not specified. But to be clear, I will note that one parent from each family is Icelandic. Thus, the children’s first language is Icelandic.

Family No. 1 decided to use a method that the French linguist Maurice Grammont introduced in 1902 (seen in Barron-Hauwaert, 2004). The parents are of different nationalities; thus, the family uses one parent-one language method which works for them very well. The child is now four years old and attends kindergarten. He speaks and understands both languages very well and speaks to each parent in their respective native language. Parents cannot communicate in L2 but use Icelandic and English.

Family No. 2 is actually a single mother with an eight-year-old son. The mother is not Icelandic, she does not use any particular teaching method and speaks three languages with her child (Icelandic, L2 and English). The child studies in an Icelandic school and speaks good Icelandic. Contrarily, he understands when his mother or other people speak L2 to him but he does not speak it. He does not have any other interactions with L2 outside of his home environment. However, most media such as TV, music, video games etc. are available in Iceland in English. The boy has developed English language skills from these activities and has a better understanding of it than of L2. Due to health issues he developed language skills later than his peers, so his mother wanted to relieve him of the burden to learn two languages simultaneously. Since they reside in Iceland it was an obvious choice to have Icelandic as a first language.

Family No. 3 is Icelandic mother and stepfather of different nationality with a nine-year-old son. Biological father is Icelandic but separated with mother when the child was five-year-old and shortly after, the stepfather came into the picture. Hence, first 5 years of the child’s life Icelandic was the only language spoken. As soon as stepfather became a part of the family, the child started to learn L2 and acquired it fast. He studied L2 at home and primary school from the age of 6. Mother and child are fluent in L2 and stepfather is proficient in Icelandic. In home environment the family tries to go by one parent-one language method but when everyone in the family participates in a conversation, the language the conversation initiated in will dictate the language spoken. Since everyone can speak both languages it is not an issue. Icelandic is the primary language for the child but is fluent in L2 and has frequent interactions in L2 at school, with TV, music, video games and in home environment.

Family No. 4 are parents of different nationalities and use one parent-one language method in very similar way as family No. 1. The child is five years old and is about to start elementary school. He speaks and understands both languages very well and speaks to each parent in their
respective native language. Soon the boy will start to learn a third language, which is English in his case. Parents communicate primarily in English and much less in Icelandic and L2.

4.5 Results and my interpretation of the interviews

This section covered the main results of my fieldwork.

Every family gave very clear answers on how they decided to raise their children and teach them to acquire new languages. Analyzing the data of each family and observing them, helped me understand them better. All the children participating in the study were born in Iceland and have parents of different nationality; also, every family has a different approach to child’s second language acquisition in some way. All but one child acquired second language in infancy, but at different levels.

Family No. 1 and 4 use one parent-one language method, which seems to be the best method that parents can use if they have this opportunity and a bilingual child is their goal. These two families seem to have very similar settings and apply a lot of the same methods that work great for them. Family No. 3 uses one parent-one language method partially. Their L2 is English, which I think is a convenient advantage for them since it’s so widely used and available in Iceland. This family showed also good results, but I think if their L2 was any other language it could be a very different result for them.

I found it interesting that family No. 1, 3 and 4 have showed better results than family No. 2. Meanwhile, the boy from family No. 2 most likely will not speak L2 in adult life since he does not get enough language interaction in his childhood. The child indeed obtained good vocabulary and understands L2 well but there is very little language activity present in the family now. The mother was told by language specialist to practice L2 interactions with her child, but she ignored it for personal reasons. As an outcome, her child’s second language acquisition is very low and slow.

Nevertheless, the findings are tentative and the developments at this point are still in need of further long-term additional research to study the issue more deeply.

The transcription of interviews is presented in Appendix B to E.
5 Conclusions

This thesis concentrated on several studies that compared the performance of early bilinguals and monolinguals and the outcomes of early bilingual’s cognitive development.

Much of the research on bilingualism in the earlier part of the 20th century concluded that bilingualism unimproves the cognitive development of children, which surely leads to intelligence decrease and education problems. Most researchers that worked before the 1960s concluded that learning a second language is harmful to children and leads to cognitive dissonances. Modern authors have argued that negative conclusions were based on studies with weak methodology.

Nevertheless, later research found that bilingualism did not have any negative impact on cognitive function. Moreover, the advantages of bilinguals over monolinguals in terms of cognition have been repeatedly demonstrated.

The publication of Peal and Lambert’s research in 1962 changed the outlook of bilingualism remarkably (Hakuta and Diaz, 1985) and proved to be of great importance to future investigators. Since then, the scientists studying bilingualism have come closer to the causes and effects of bilingualism on children’s intellectual capabilities.

The social environment of a child has been shown to be the most important factor in successful bilingualism. It is the social environment that affects the cognitive development of the child, either positively or negatively. Children must have a valid level of L1 not to experience negative losses in L2 literacy.

My fieldwork evaluated the language environment of four bilingual families and their children that live in Iceland to get a better understanding of their progress and success in daily life. I conducted four interviews with parents of these bilingual children in order to identify which methods they use and how their approaches may differ. Subject of the research was put on each child’s home language environment to explore ways to influence and improve language skills. No comparison has been made with native Icelandic children.

I researched my participants, visited their homes and observed them, described each element of the process of interviews, collected results and interpreted it. I investigated the quality and quantity of each parent’s input to child’s language development. After doing the fieldwork and analyzing all the collected data, I concluded that family No. 1 and 4, which use one parent-one language method, seems to have better results than family No. 2. Regarding family No. 3, it was a benefit for them that the child and mother had acquired L2 proficiency prior to needing it in home environment. For them there was no need for a one parent-one language method. If L2 were any other language it would be a different case and the child would most likely have more
difficulties acquiring that language. If that would be the case, they presume they would utilize the *one parent-one language* method, as they have seen the benefits of it.

The current study is very limited in scope since it covered only four families; clearly, much more research on this topic is needed. Thus, subsequent studies could have more participants and focus on different types of families which could help to get a better understanding of the questions at hand. Further long-term research is recommended to study the issue more deeply.

Moreover, it makes sense to continue studying communication forms and ways to increase vocabulary, for example, siblings’ communication. Early research had shown that these factors play a significant role in language learning (see e.g. Duursma, Pan, and Raikes, 2008; Obied, 2009). In my research none of the children had siblings; other types of families were not available to me in any considerable amount at that time and I presume that they could show very different results. I suppose that size of family is an important factor on this topic. Number of siblings and especially the matter of how many of them are bilingual can have a big impact on each child’s support and engagement in L2 language. More research can be done on other types of family structures or with a larger number of participants.

Maintaining scientific interest and continuing research on bilingualism, especially with new positive findings, can motivate parents to binary language learning and children to high academic achievement.

Finally, bilingualism has multiple various aspects which need to be taken into consideration when investigated. It has mainly positive impact on children’s cognitive development, but meanwhile it continues to be a versatile subject with many meanings which researchers struggle to identify. However, while the data collected up until today may not yet bring to light all the various sides of bilingualism, it certainly provides as serious input in getting one step closer to understanding the subject better.
Bibliography


Appendix A: Interview with Bilingual Families. Parents’ Questionnaire

1. What language did you speak to each other before you had a child?
2. As parents, what language do you talk to each other now?
3. What language do you speak with your child?
4. At what age did your child start to talk?
5. Did your child start to learn/speak both languages at the same time?
6. Does your family speak third language at home?
7. Has your child any interaction with third language at home (TV, parents)?
8. Do you follow the one parent – one language method and do you have any problems using it?
9. Do you sometimes mix up what languages to speak to your spouse or child?
10. Does your child get confused when he hears two languages spoken around him?
11. Does your child mix up what language to speak to each parent? If yes, how to do you respond to it?
12. Did you get any professional advice about what language to speak with your child or you decided it yourselves?
13. Do you feel that it’s more challenge for your child to be bilingual than other children that learn only one language?
14. Did you have any worries that your child might start to speak later than monolingual children of the same age?
15. Does your child speak both languages on same level or he has primal language?
16. Have you ever thought that one language should be more important to your child than the other?
17. In what ways are you trying to encourage your child’s active use of the minority language?
18. Do you have friends who have bilingual child?
19. Does the child have friends in Iceland that speak minority language?
20. Do you think that your child receives adequate amount of minority language on daily basis?
21. What kinds of games do you play with your child? How you trying to make your games educational and fun?
22. Are you reading aloud for your child in the minority language? What does your home library look like? How many children’s books in the minority language do you have?
23. How often does your child hear music in the minority language? Are you getting new music on a regular basis, to match his growing maturity and interests?
24. Are you using passive media—like TV, DVDs, and online videos—as supplemental input to more interactive exposure? And are you actively using such media in the minority language?

25. What other resources do you use to help your child in his bilingual journey?

26. What does your circle of support look like, from your spouse and other family members to school and the wider community? Do you have any difficulties or lack of support? How did you deal with these contrary reactions? What more can you do to strengthen the support around you?

27. What are the benefits for your child, you, family, others in raising a bilingual child?

28. What is your view of failure when it comes to raising a bilingual child?

29. Your comments if you like to add more.
Appendix B: The Answers of the Family No. 1

1. English.
2. Icelandic and English.
3. L2 and his father in Icelandic.
4. 9-10 months.
5. Yes.
6. We parents speak sometimes English.
7. Yes, mainly parents and music in English.
8. Yes, we follow it as well as possible.
9. Yes.
10. No, he has been very clearly separating them from very young age.
11. He has always separated them very well, but he speaks sometimes Icelandic to me, when there is lot of people around us that speak Icelandic. He has noticed that I understand and speak Icelandic also. I try to guide him to talk L2 to me and help him to say what he is after, if he does not know the words in L2.
12. We decided ourselves.
13. No, the languages seem to be his strong point. Kindergarten has also said, that he speaks better both languages than many one language kids in his age speak one language.
14. No, I did not have time to worry about that, he started talking so early.
15. Icelandic is definitely his primal language, though he speaks both well.
16. No, definitely not.
17. We play and read together and we try to talk to his relatives in my homeland fairly often.
18. Yes.
19. Yes.
20. Sometimes not. It really depends on the days.
21. We just play normal board games and card games. I am sure I should try to use more the language in different activities, but I am not very creative.
22. We read a lot and have a lot of books on both languages. I am however much more active to read to him in L2, than my spouse in Icelandic.
23. We listen to music in L2 almost every day. But it really varies. He has his favorites and though I am trying to bring in new songs, he is not always keen on that. Wants to rather hear the favorites.
24. No, in fact, I have struggled to find programs in L2 and the little he sees on TV is mostly in Icelandic.
25. I am definitely not good in that. I have used very little new resources and have very little imagination for that.

26. Kindergarten has been very supportive, because there are also other bilingual kids in the group. They let the kids teach each other words from the other language they speak, and talk about the other home countries. The other side of the family had hard times in the beginning, they found it very difficult that they did not understand what I was talking to our child. But I have actively tried to make them understand the importance of talking both languages and guiding them how to react in case the child speaks something they do not understand.

27. I think it helps him to learn languages over all, it will help him to be more open to new languages and to people from different origin and backgrounds. I hope. In general, it is very important to form the connection with his family in my home country.

28. I would find that I have failed, if he would now lose the L2 completely and would stop talking it.

29. —
Appendix C: The Answers of the Family No. 2

1. —
2. —
3. With my child I speak English, Icelandic and L2.
4. My child started to talk quite late. It is probably because he heard three languages from birth also because he has some problems with health. He expressed his feelings but without words. So, he started to speak properly when he was around four. Also, his dad insisted that he will speak Icelandic.
5. Yes, he started to learn languages at the same time, but Icelandic was always in priority.
6. Yes, we sometimes speak English.
7. Yes, he has interaction with English. He watches TV in English and sometimes use some English words, which he heard on TV, when he is talking to his friends.
8. No, I do not.
9. Sometimes yes, more before, but less now.
10. I am not sure how to answer. He usually speaks Icelandic. Sometimes he speaks English.
12. Speech therapist suggested to speak with him L2. He said that kid will learn Icelandic in school and English from TV. But sometimes this does not work.
13. I do not concentrate on difficulties. But sometimes he does not understand something if I speak L2 to him and he asks me to translate it to Icelandic.
14. No, I did not worry.
15. No, my child speaks good Icelandic and English. He understands L2 but do not speak it.
16. Yes, I always thought so. Icelandic is more important. We live in this country now and this culture is in priority too. He was born in this country, so he has to speak this language.
17. We play games. For example, to name the body parts in Icelandic, English and L2.
18. Yes, we have.
19. Yes, we have such family. They came from my mother land. We (adults) speak L2 but our kids speak Icelandic to each other.
20. He hear L2 only from me, so receive it from me. He does not watch TV in L2. He does not understand it and does not like it. If he sees some program in L2 he asks me to play it in English.
21. We play game in which I say word in Icelandic and he has to say it in L2. It is difficult for his to pronounce words in L2. He underrated L2 but sometimes he asks me to translate the assignment that I ask him to do.
22. I have only books for adults in L2. I read him books in L2 only when he was very little. Now he reads himself in Icelandic and English. These languages are in bigger priority.
23. No music is in L2. Also, he likes to listen to music not texts and language.
24. All passive media is in English.
25. At home I speak to him L2 and he answers in Icelandic. He watches TV in English. His school is in Icelandic.
26. Nobody supports me.
27. He meets different cultures, tries different food. He sees and understand that life could be different, also in social-economic sense.
28. I don’t know what failure we are talking about. My kid lives in Iceland. He will know L2 at some level. At least we will understand L2. He also will know culture of my mother land.
29. I see that in future my kid will speak English and Icelandic. I hope my kid will get good education. He will succeed in this country and everything will be good.
Appendix D: The Answers of the Family No. 3

1. —
2. Mainly English (L2), but occasionally Icelandic.
3. Most of the time Icelandic, but sometimes L2 (English) when we all participate in a conversation.
4. Very late, because he had an ear canal complication, so his hearing was very limited for the first 3 years. It was not until after his hearing was fixed that he started to speak properly and from there on he learned quickly. At that time, it was only Icelandic spoken in the family.
5. No, Icelandic first and L2 around the age of 6.
6. No.
7. No.
8. Yes, we follow it most of the time but it depends what language our kid chooses when he starts a conversation.
9. Occasionally but it is not an issue. Everybody understands each other.
10. Not at all, he handles it very well.
11. Yes that happens often, but we respond in the same language as the conversation started in.
12. No, it was all natural and we decided it ourselves.
13. Absolutely not.
14. Yes, but and it was for different reasons and our child was monolingual at first.
15. Icelandic will always be primary, but he is fluent in L2.
16. No.
17. Speak more exclusively L2 with his stepfather.
18. Yes, few.
19. Yes, several friends from school.
20. We think so.
21. We play board games and computer games in both languages.
22. Yes, we do, but it is not books. We don’t read books for our child anymore and we do not have any kids’ books in L2.
23. Yes, most of the music is in L2 and he discovers it himself.
24. Yes, all the time, almost exclusively in L2.
25. Classes at school help a lot.
26. We feel full support everywhere. L2 is so common and accepted in Iceland.
27. Languages are just a great tool for life and opens more possibilities in life.
28. Just the general ability to speak and write in both languages. We think it is also important not mix the vocabulary of the languages together as some bilinguals do.
29. L2 in the family is English and he had a lot of interactions with L2 even before the stepfather became part of the family. That sped up the language acquisition of L2 as well as classes at school.

Appendix E: The Answers of the Family No. 4

1. English
2. English, but little less now.
3. Icelandic, L2 and English.
4. 11 months old.
5. Yes.
6. Yes, we parents speak English often but the child hasn’t learned it yet.
7. Yes, English.
8. Yes, we follow the one parent – one language method and we like it.
9. It happens sometimes, but not often.
10. We think not.
11. It happens occasionally, and we tell him to switch language.
12. We decided ourselves.
13. Little bit, but it’s not a problem.
14. Yes, at first, but we had no reason to worry.
15. Yes, he is equally proficient in both.
16. No, unless he would be incapable of learning two languages.
17. With conversations, books, singing and other media.
18. Yes.
19. Yes, the same language and few with different language.
20. Yes, we think so.
21. Singing, role-playing games and just playing around.
22. Yes, our book collection is very equally distributed in both languages.
23. Yes, if anything its more music in L2 and English than in Icelandic.
24. All the time.
25. Reading and writing exercises, singing and talking with extended family in L2.
26. It is good support from family and most of the time from school and wider community. We don’t have any problems with it.
27. The child can speak to whole extended family and experience and interact with two very different cultures. We as parents also benefit from the language lessons to learn better each other’s languages.
28. Not being able to teach him both languages and interact with him in both of them.
29. —