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DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



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Supporting Bilingual Language Development in Young Children: Research Update and Recommendations for Parents and Professionals

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Presenter

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- Sonia Aller, PhD, CCC-SLP
- Amanda Tyree, MA, CCC-SLP
- Jessica Gutierrez, MA, CCC-SLP

Why am I passionate about bilingual language development?

- Fernando, age 2 ½, is playing with his mother, Juana. He is trying to initiate talking with her. She responds with smiles and gestures but no words. Fernando seems frustrated and withdraws to play by himself. I find out later that Juana has been counselled by a professional to speak only English to her child, because his speech is delayed. Juana speaks fluently in Spanish but has very limited English skills. So she has stopped talking to Fernando, worried that she will interfere with his language development.

Objectives

- Gain knowledge about research findings related to bilingual language development in young children with autism and other developmental disabilities
- Learn how to distinguish language disorders from typical bilingual language development patterns
- Learn how to support bilingual communication in young children with autism and other developmental disabilities



What does “bilingual” mean?

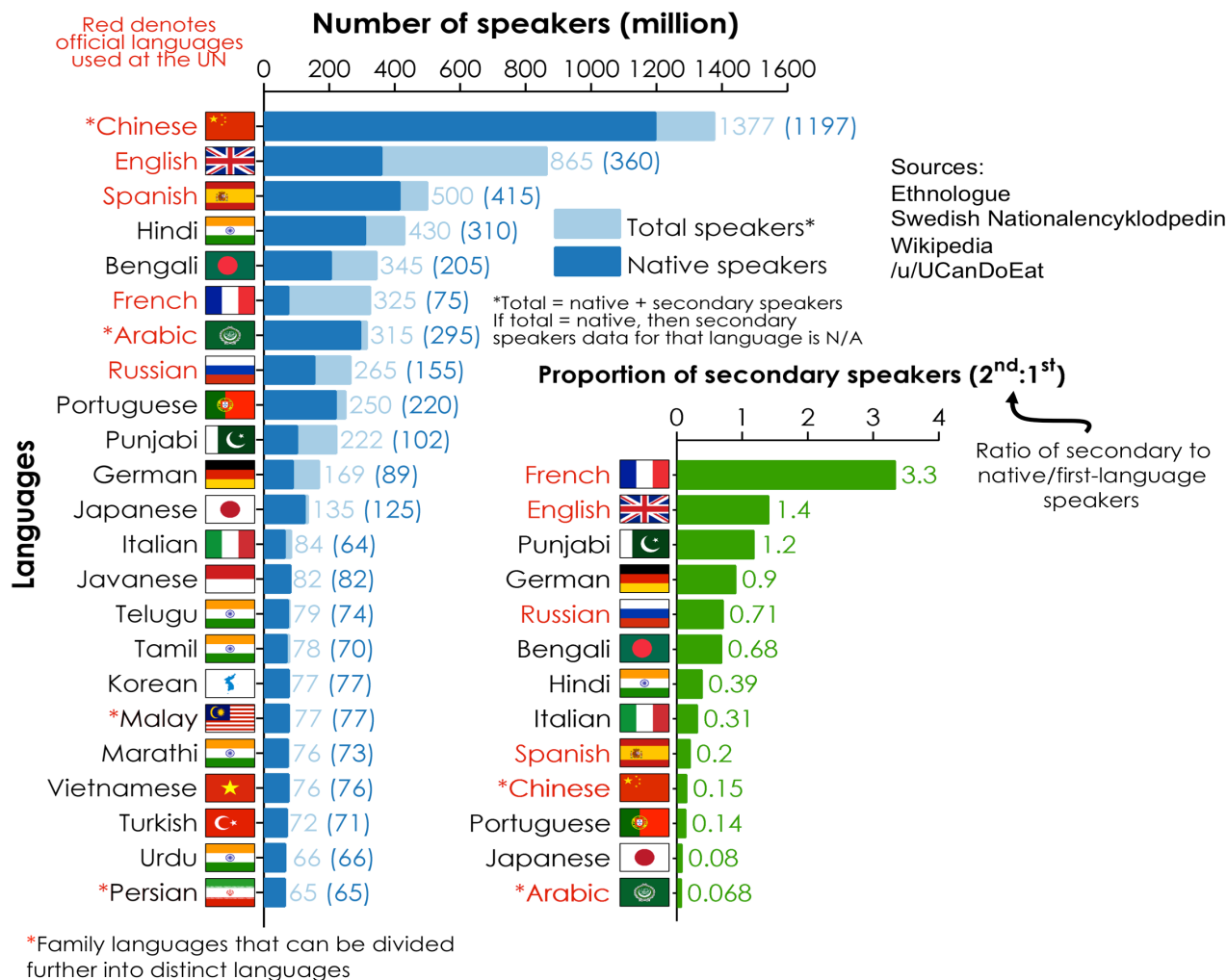
- **Simultaneous bilingual** = learn two languages at the same time, from birth; these children really have two “first” languages
- **Sequential bilingual** = add a second language after first language has started developing (e.g. after age 3 years)
- Most bilingual children are more proficient in one of their languages
- Which language is dominant can shift over time



Is it unusual to raise children bilingually?

- World-wide, approximately 50% of people speak more than one language
- 21% of individuals in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home

Is it unusual to raise children bilingually?





Benefits of Bilingualism

- If children are exposed to two languages from an early age and become proficient in both, advantages are found, such as:
 - Metalinguistic awareness, which is linked to reading/writing skill
 - Executive control functions (because they have learned selective attention and inhibition)
 - Later onset of dementia in older adulthood
- Based on research by Bialystok at York Univ in Toronto

Fun Facts About How Children Develop More than One Language



Bilingual Babbling

- Babies exposed to French and English show language-specific babbling patterns
 - Baby babbled in “French” with Dad and in “English” with Mom

Maneva & Genesee (2002). *Bilingual babbling: Evidence for language differentiation in bilingual first language acquisition.*

Paradis (2011). *Do bilingual two-year-olds have separate phonological systems?*



Critical Period for Bilingualism

- Babies are born with the ability to distinguish and make the sounds from all world languages
- By age 12 months, they lose the ability to make sounds that they are not exposed to



Humans Need Humans to Learn Language

- Patricia Kuhl, PhD, Professor, University of Washington Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences
- Video clip about infants (raised in English-speaking homes) being taught Mandarin



Humans Need Humans

- Why is the live human presence so important to language learning?
 - Attention and arousal = motivation
 - Live humans combine speech with eye gaze
 - Joint attention; reciprocal interactions

Typical Patterns when Learning Two Language

- Code-switching/Code-mixing:
 - Changing from one language to the other in the same phrase or sentence
 - This is not a sign of a language delay/impairment
 - This is not a sign of confusion. Children will use words they know rather than not say anything at all
 - Many adults who are fluently bilingual continue to codeswitch
- Children should not be reprimanded for code-switching
- Parents should not be discouraged from raising their child bilingually because the child is code-switching



Typical Patterns When Adding a Second Language

- Silent period:
 - During initial phase of second-language acquisition, child focuses on listening so they talk less. They can understand more than they can say.
- Gradual process
 - usually takes 3 - 5 years to become as proficient as native-speakers



Loss of the First Language

- Language loss/attrition:
 - Child loses skills and fluency in first language if it is not reinforced and maintained
 - This is especially likely when the first language is a minority language in the culture
- Parents should be encouraged and supported to provide a rich model of the home language

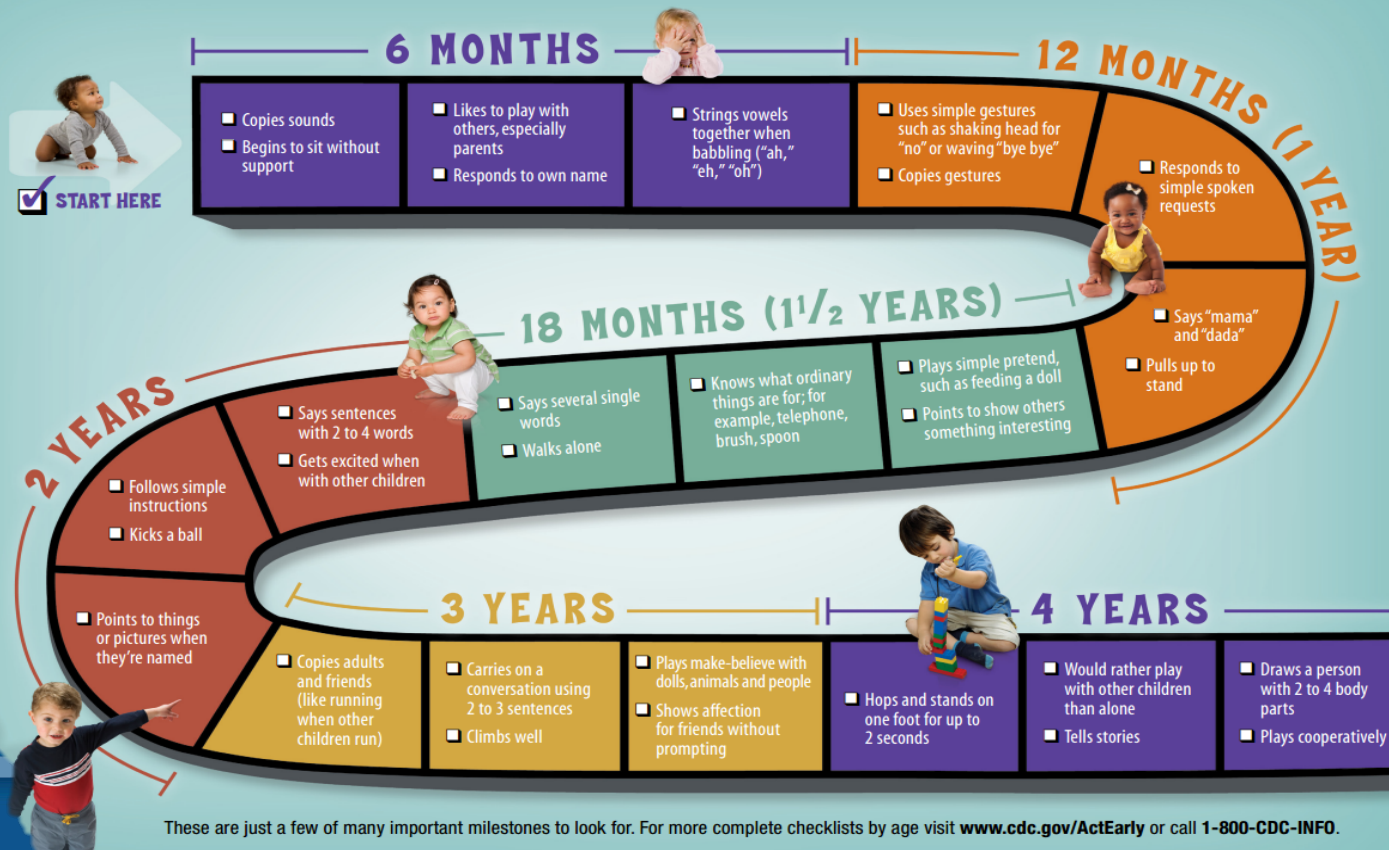
Myths and Facts About Bilingualism



Myth 1: Bilingual Children's Language Will be Delayed

Your Child's Early Development is a Journey

Check off the milestones your child has reached and share your child's progress with the doctor at every visit.



These are just a few of many important milestones to look for. For more complete checklists by age visit www.cdc.gov/ActEarly or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.



- Classic study showed that language milestones are the same for bilingual and monolingual children
 - 25 Spanish-English bilinguals and 35 from monolingual homes
 - Language milestones were tracked from ages 8 to 30 months
 - Combining vocabulary in both languages, bilinguals had same vocabulary as monolinguals
- Pearson, Fernandez, & Oller (1993). Lexical development in bilingual infants and toddlers: Comparison to monolingual norms. *Language Learning*, 43, 93-120.

Fact: Bilingual Children Develop Language at the Same Rate as Monolingual

- Many studies have now shown bilingual children reach milestones at the same rate:
 - Babbling
 - First words by 12 - 13 months
 - Range of nouns, verbs, prepositions, etc
 - Two-word combinations between 18 and 24 months
- If a bilingual child is not reaching typical milestones—seek help! It's not because he or she is being exposed to 2 languages.



Fact: The second language may take time to become as strong as the first

- Sequential bilinguals will initially have stronger skills in their first language
- If assessed in their second language they may seem “delayed”
- To determine if delayed, need to assess in first language and combine words from both languages



Myth 2: Children are Confused by Exposure to Two Languages



- Some children may show cross-linguistic influence: rules from the more dominant language may get applied incorrectly in the less dominant language
 - This is a typical part of bilingual language development
- Children don't have difficulty distinguishing between the two languages
- Children are good at figuring out when/with whom they should use which language



- Children feel confused when their parents change their language use
 - Parent stops speaking in the home language to the child after concern about language delay is raised
 - Family members stop conversation when child comes in the room to avoid exposing him to the “wrong” language

Myth 3: Reducing to English will Increase Children's Chances for Success in School and Life





Reducing to English: Facts

- Learning one language well helps children learn other languages
- Learning to read in the home language helps children learn to read in English
- Children need the best language models: rich vocabulary, grammatical structure



Reducing to English: Facts

- Parents should speak to their children in the language most comfortable for the parent
 - They will speak with correct grammar
 - use a wider range of vocabulary
 - enable their children to be part of family conversations
 - help children learn from overheard conversations as well as when spoken to directly

Myth 4: Children with Developmental Delays or Autism Spectrum Disorders Will Have More Delays if Exposed to Two Languages





Facts: Bilingual Language Development in Children with DD/ASD

- Studies have compared children with disabilities from monolingual and bilingual homes to determine if there is a difference in language acquisition
- Important to test children in their dominant language or in both languages if bilingual

Children with Down Syndrome

- Study of children with Down Syndrome being raised in bilingual (English-French) vs monolingual homes in Canada
- Ages 2 ½ to 8 years
- No difference in language abilities for the two groups—bilingual children had equally developed skills as monolingual children
- Kay-Raining Bird et al. (2005). The language abilities of bilingual children with Down syndrome. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 14, 187-199.

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Study of children with ASD from bilingual (n = 45) and monolingual (n = 30) environments
- Ages 3 to 6 ½ years
- No differences in language skills between the two groups
- Hambly, C. & Fombonne, E. (2012). The impact of bilingual environments on language development in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 42, 1342-1352.



Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

- Studies of bilingual and monolingual children with SLI
- No differences in grammatical morphology (such as use of verb tenses) between the two groups
- Children with SLI were able to become bilingual when a second language was added
- Based on research by Paradis and colleagues (French-English bilingual children) and by Gutierrez-Clellen and colleagues (Spanish-English bilingual children)

Bilingual versus Language Impairment





Over-identification

- When a child is labeled as having a language disability when in fact they are still learning the second language and have no delays in their first language
- Can lead to inappropriate placement and restricted educational opportunities



Under-identification

- When a language impairment is missed because parents or professionals assume the delays are due to bilingualism
- Leads to children not receiving appropriate intervention, which can impact acquisition of academic skills as well



- If a child has a language impairment, it will be apparent in any language they try to learn
 - Is there a delay in the first language too, or only the second?
 - If delay is *only* in the second language, give time to learn it—it can take 3 to 5 years to become fully fluent
 - If delayed in the first language, refer for speech-language evaluation to determine if impairment
 - Need to also consider language exposure: is the child continuing to get a rich language model in the first language?



Late Talking vs Language Impairment

- About 10 - 15% of children are “late talkers”—reaching language milestones later than average
- About half of children who are late in their language milestones catch up
- The other half have a longer-lasting language impairment



Late Talking vs Language Impairment

Hard to predict which children will catch up and which will continue to fall behind; the following are positive signs:

- Age-appropriate receptive language
- Use of a range of gestures to communicate
- Progress: continuing to add new words or combining more words in utterances



Helping a Late Talker

- Bilingualism is *not* linked to later talking—developmental milestones are the same for bilinguals as for monolinguals. Don't remove a language!
- Provide *rich* language input in both languages
- Seek an evaluation by a bilingual speech-language pathologist to see if early intervention services are recommended—don't just “wait and see”



Professional Messages to Parents About Bilingualism

- Research literature suggests that many parents are counseled to speak only English to their children, especially if the child has a language delay or autism spectrum disorder.
- In our study, 7% of parents said they had been advised by a physician or teacher not to raise their child to be bilingual
- 12% - 15% of professionals thought that bilingual children would have more delays

Consequences of Discouraging Bilingualism

- Loss of home language especially likely when the home language is a minority language in the culture
- Parents provide a more rich language model when speaking their home language
- Confusion happens when parents suddenly try to switch to English based on professional advice
- Parents using their home language speak with more heightened affect/emotion which stimulates children's learning

Consequences of Discouraging Bilingualism

- Culture is embedded in language—language is the medium for children to learn about the values, beliefs, and norms of their family culture
- Parent-child attachment is linked to language and communication
- Children become disconnected from extended family members



Supporting the Home Language in Children with Delays & Disabilities

- Encourage parents to speak to their children in the language in which they are most comfortable—even if the child has delays
- Provide bilingual intervention when possible
- If SLP or other professionals do not speak the home language . . .



Supporting the Home Language for Monolingual Professionals

- Train parents and paraprofessionals as partners in intervention
- Consider peer- or sibling-mediated intervention strategies
- Remember that speech-language therapy provided in the school language will also help with language use at home
- Kohnert et al (2005) *Intervention with linguistically diverse preschool children.*



Recommendations for Parents

- Option 1: Use the language that you are most comfortable in at home. Your child can learn the second language when he or she starts school.
- Option 2: Use two languages from the start. If there are people living in the home who speak different languages, your child can be exposed to more than one language and will learn to distinguish them.



Recommendations for Parents

- Give your child many opportunities to hear and practice using both languages in everyday situations.
- Tell stories and sign songs; share books
- Talk about your traditions and cultures
- Make sure interactions in home language are varied and fun, and not just giving instructions

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association website: www.asha.org
 - The Advantages of Being Bilingual
 - Teaching Your Child Two Languages
 - Becoming Bilingual/El Nino Bilingue
- Paradis, J., Genesee, F. & Crago, M. B. (2010). *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning*, 2nd Edition.

- Head Start materials: The Importance of Home Language series

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/home-language.html>

- Bilingualism: Frequently Asked Questions

www.literacytrust.org.uk

- Center for Applied Linguistics
- Wharton, Robert H., Levine, Karen, Miller, E., Breslau, Joshua, & Greenspan, Stanley (2000). Children with special needs in bilingual families: A developmental approach to language recommendations. *ICDL Clinical Practice Guidelines*. The Unicorn Children's Foundation: ICDL Press, Pp 141-151.

Comments? Questions?

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