

► Bilingualism

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Background

- ❖ It is estimated that one person in every three worldwide regularly use two languages for daily communicative functioning (Li Wei, 2000).
- ❖ There are two types of bilingual acquisition patterns occurring in children: *sequential* and *simultaneous*. In sequential bilingualism, children learn their first language (L1) prior to their exposure to an additional, or second, language (L2). In simultaneous bilingualism, children are exposed concurrently to two languages.
- ❖ The proportions of languages to which the child is exposed in daily contexts, together with the pattern of language use within the child's home and the type of linguistic exposure the child receives outside the family environment, are important determiners of the developing pattern of bilingualism.

Interesting facts

- ❖ Bilingualism does not increase children's risk for language impairments.
- ❖ Bilingualism is actually said to be advantageous to the language learning process of young children.
- ❖ Bilingual speakers frequently engage in *borrowing* and *code switching*, so that elements from their two languages are integrated into a single utterance. Children exposed to bilingual environments are often observed to engage in similar behaviours themselves, probably in response to the model provided by their carers.

How to help

- ❖ A child brought up in a mixed bilingual environment and taking time to speak might actually be trying to make sense of the mixture of languages to which s/he is exposed.
- ❖ There is increasing acceptance of the fact that young children brought up in bilingual contexts and presenting with language impairments should be exposed to language

patterns that are *natural* for the persons providing them as well as for the child receiving them.

- ❖ It is recommendable that a consistent pattern in the use of the two languages is maintained so that children learn to differentiate between the two languages in their environment.
- ❖ Recent research states that carers who expose young children to borrowing and code switching in their daily communicative contexts are not to refrain from doing so since this is a natural behaviour for bilingual speakers.
- ❖ Whenever a child exposed to two or more languages seems to be taking long to talk, advice from a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) should be sought. The SLP may try to determine whether the child has relatively more strengths in his/her L1 or L2 or whether both languages have developed to approximately the same level. Therapy, if indicated, may target both languages simultaneously. Alternatively, the focus may be first on one language and subsequently on the other, depending on the child's level of ability in both languages.

Useful Links

- ❖ www.multilingualfamily.co.uk