Finally, children's language mixing can be a strategy to avoid words that are difficult to pronounce. For example, Werner Leopold (1947) observed that his German-English bilingual daughter Hildegard preferred to use the German *da* [dɑ] instead of English *there* [ðɛɪ], but the English *high* [hɑɪ] over *hoch* [hox] because they were easier for her to pronounce.

8.5.3 Bilingual vs. Monolingual First-Language Acquisition

Let's go back to the idea that Mario may not know words like *stop sign* or *school bus* in Spanish. Does this mean that his language acquisition is lagging behind monolingual children of his age? Some early researchers have suggested that learning two languages from birth would exceed the limitations of the child's brain. They assumed that bilingual children would lag behind their monolingual peers, and, indeed, studies from that time indicate that bilingual children's language skills are inferior to those of monolingual children.

During the 1980s, however, researchers began reevaluating the earlier studies and found that many of them were methodologically flawed. For example, some studies compared monolinguals' language skills with bilinguals' skills in their non-dominant language. The studies conducted in the 1980s suggested that, on the contrary, growing up bilingually is advantageous. In particular, studies found that bilingual children develop some metalinguistic skills, such as understanding arbitrariness (see File 1.4), earlier than monolingual children.

Current studies on bilingual language acquisition display a more balanced view. On the one hand, bilingual children may lag behind their monolingual peers in certain specific areas, like the vocabulary of one of their two languages (after all, they have to learn twice as much), but they have usually caught up by the time they reach puberty. This doesn't mean that they can't communicate their ideas; instead, it usually just means that there are some concepts that are easier to express in one language than the other. On the other hand, growing up bilingually may have some cognitive advantages, as mentioned above; and, of course, the end result is the ability to communicate fluently in two different languages. Other than that, bilingual children go through the same stages of language acquisition as monolingual children of each of the languages.

It should be mentioned that there are cases of problematic bilingual language acquisition. Sometimes children who grow up bilingually do not become functional bilinguals, usually because they are confronted with a bad attitude toward bilingualism, or one of their languages is not valued in their community and its use is discouraged. Thus, it is not the limitations of a child's brain or capabilities that cause problems in bilingual language acquisition, but rather a negative social environment: any child exposed to two languages in a positive social environment can grow up to be fully bilingual.

8.5.4 Second-Language Acquisition

As mentioned above, not every bilingual speaker acquired both languages during childhood. Many people become bilingual later in life, after already acquiring their native language. This is called **second-language acquisition.** While children exposed to two languages from birth or early childhood will usually grow up mastering both languages as do monolingual native speakers of those languages, people learning a language later in life usually attain different levels of competence. Some people achieve native-like competence in a second language, but the vast majority of second-language learners do not. Speakers may learn the syntax and vocabulary of a second language perfectly (although even this is rare), but few learn the phonological system that well. Thus, most second-language speakers speak with a **foreign accent** (see Section 3.1.3 and File 10.1). It seems that non-native forms, as part of either the morpho-syntax or pronunciation, can become fixed and not change, even after years of instruction. This is called **fossilization.**