

CHILDHOOD BILINGUALISM

Part 2

Simultaneous learning of two languages

- learning process through which a child becomes bilingual from early infancy, three stages can be distinguished:
 - (1) the child has one lexical system which includes words from both languages;
 - (2) the child distinguishes two different lexicons but applies the same syntactic rules to both languages;
 - (3) [about 2.9 to 3 years]: the child has two linguistic codes, differentiated both in lexicon and in syntax, but each language is exclusively associated with the person using that language.
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- Only at the end of this stage, when the tendency to categorize people in terms of their language decreases, can one say that a child is truly bilingual.
 - Bilingual children more often than not, fall in the category of simultaneous, balanced, compound bilinguals in ideal condition.

- Studies have found that children simultaneously learning two languages at an early stage often cannot distinguish between their two languages.
- Almost all studies on infant bilingual language have found that children tend to 'mix' components of their two languages at all levels:
 - phonological, lexical, phrasal etc. scientists have claimed these prove the underlying unitary language system.

- pfeifTing [GERMAN/ENGLISH]: WHISTLING
- I asked him QUE YO VOY A CASA [English/Spanish] I asked him that I go home
- Putzen Zahne CON JABON [German/ Spanish]brushing teeth with soap
- A house PINK [French/English; French structure of using noun before adj]
- They open, THE WINDOWS? [French/English; French structure of using noun before adj]
- You want to OPEN the lights? [in French, the equivalent of 'turn on' in English is open, used for lights]

interpretations

- There are many interpretations of such mixing. One of them being the unitary language system, that proposed “ words from the two languages did not represent two different speech systems but one...”
- Child language acquisition also points to a debate on critical period hypothesis. Recent studies reveal that language learning abilities decline throughout our lifespan rather than after a particular point in time.(more on this later)

- When children learn two languages simultaneously, there are three stages of development that has been found to be common.
- Most of the empirical investigations of bilingual development have found mixing; phonological, lexical, phrasal, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic mixing have been reported

- Loan blends: words that are made up of phonological segments from two languages. E.g. kats [cat] from Estonian/Swedish bilingual, Swedish word for cat is /katt/ and Estonian is /kass/.
- Morphological mixing: pfeifting [whistling; German English; correct German word: pfeifend]
- Die Madchen's going night night [the girl is going night night]
- Phrase level: putzen zahne con jabon [German/Spanish] brushing teeth with soap

Stage I

- this is the first stage and at this stage, children have one lexical system that includes words from both languages. A word in one language almost always does not have a corresponding word in the other language. Words from two languages frequently appear together in two-three word constructions. Children at this stage do not use much of sentences.

- Often, children do not consider two corresponding words in two languages, not as corresponding. In one case reported, an Italian-German bilingual child used the words **la** ['there' in Italian] and **da** ['there' in German] to mean different things: la for visible things and da for invisible things.
- The child here is Lisa, lived in Rome, where the father spoke Italian and mother spoke German, always.
 - Lisa: miao miao [while coming from outside and going to her mother]
 - Mother: wo ist miao? {where is miao?}
 - Lisa: La miao. {there miao}
 - Mother : wo ist miao?
 - Pulling her mother outside and continuing the conversation
 - Lisa: da ist miao. {there is miao}

- Again, Lisa uses **da** and **daki** in interesting ways. **Da** is derived from **dare** [IIIP Sg; to give] and daki is derived from danke [thank you in German] . she uses the word 'daki' when she wants to thank someone, give something to someone, or to get something from somebody.
 - Daki bukh [her mother had just given her a book]
 - Daki [while giving a pencil to her mother]
 - Mamma tita daki [she wants her mother to give her the pencil]
 - She learnt to use da around 1 year 10 months and used it only to give something to somebody
 - Da [offering a sweet to her mother]

- So, at this stage, the child's speech has only one lexical form.
- Some researchers have called this form of language a "language system of his own".
- It is only when the knowledge of the two languages grow and the child is able to generalize across languages, that she is able to distinguish between two lexical systems.
- When the child reaches this stage, the child begins to use sentences in one language, the choice depending on the person being spoken to.

Stage II

- At this stage the child is able to distinguish words from different languages, but applies same syntactic rule to both.
- The child now has corresponding words in both the languages, in the sense that the same object is indicated by two different words pertaining to two different languages.
- Significantly, words drawn from two lexicons do not occur together in construction. However, how they arrive at this stage depends on some factors that may influence this choice.

- In case of Lisa, she learnt the word ‘occhiali’ [glasses] early as her father wears them. One day, her mother draws a woman wearing glasses and teaches her the word ‘brillen’ [glasses in German]. She then tells her to show the drawing to father and tell him what it shows.
 - Father: cos’è questo? [what is this?]
 - Lisa: ‘Brillen’ [she repeats ‘Brillen’ many times but never says ‘occhiali’]
 - Then she points to father’s glasses and says: ‘Occhiali’.

- She repeats the same every time she looks at father's glasses and insists on calling them 'occhiali' and does not agree to call them 'brillen'.
- Even after her mother tells her that 'occhiali di papi' corresponds to 'papa's brillen'
- It takes her a long time to agree that occhiali and brillen are essentially the same thing. But she remains strongly influenced by the context in which she learnt the two words.

Stage III

- At this stage the child speaks two languages differentiated at both lexical and syntactic level. However, each language is associated with the person using that language: one person—one language phenomena.

- e.g.
 - ein kleines haus [a small house]
 - questa e Lisa piccolina [this is Lisa small]

there are still times when they show interference, as this is a slow process. But it is safe to say that the differentiation starts at this stage.

- quetto e di Guilia libro [this is guilia's book, based on German structure: 'das ist Guilia's buch']
- instead of, questo e il libro di Lisa [correct structure]

Some other types of mixing

- Semantics: you want to open the lights? [French English bilingual child]
- Syntactic: they open, the windows? A house pink [French English bilingual]

Some other explanations for mixing

- Rate of mixing varies considerably across studies. A summary of various studies claimed that the rate of mixing is at 20% to 30% in Stage I, 12% to 20% at Stage II and 6% to 12% at Stage III and so on. Though this remains a fact, the explanations for the same is controversial
- Sometimes even the adult native speakers of English in Quebec use such mixtures in their language.
- It is possible that the bilingual children mix because they have heard mixing by their parents

- Often the context of language use by the child is not factored in by the researchers reporting the findings.

For example,

- Nellie a French English bilingual admonished her father so that he does not take away her barrettes, first in French [laisse les barrettes, touché pas les barrettes, papa] and then desperately in English [me's gonna put it back in the bag so no one's gonna took it].
- Here her attempt in French was primarily based on the fact that her father speaks French.

- In order to establish unitary system hypothesis, one needs to establish all things being equal bilingual children use items from both language indiscriminately in all contexts of communication. That is to say there should not be a predominant language for a particular context.

For example, the case of Lisa reports only her speaking to her German mother, but no evidence of her speaking with her Italian father is given.

- Similarly, the report [Vihman 1985] of the bilingual child using Estonian in English context contrast the same with English use in Estonian context. But the author does not report use of English In Estonian Context.

- Children lack appropriate lexical items in one language and simply compensates them by borrowing from the other language. Vihman suggest child stops mixing gradually as they are made aware of societal norms and standard of behavior by the adults and they show their ability to adhere to them.
- Mixing might also happen due to restricted use of specific lexical items. Case in point is that of 'occhiali' , where her preference for the Italian term for the object was simply a result of her father [Italian] using glasses and thus using it more frequently than the mother.

- Sometimes it is a matter of structural linguistic factors. Vihman (1985) reports that her son used English function words in otherwise Estonian context because English words were more simple and salient than their Estonian counterpart.
- Hence the reasonable explanation can be that of nature of acquisitional progress. Even monolingual children show overextension when they know only few words and uses them for a number of contexts. As their vocabulary grows, they use more varied and less overextended words.