Growing up bilingually in Austria

Research paper English

Submitted to
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1.

picture 2

You'll never get anywhere on the continent unless you can understand the superior English spoken by foreigners...
Preface

From the moment we did an article on bilingualism in our English class in the 7th form I was fascinated by this topic. I admire everyone who is able to speak more than one language fluently. Therefore, it was clear to me right away that my topic for this research paper was going to be bilingualism in Austria.

I wanted to find out as much as possible about the lives of bilingual children, problems they have to face and educational possibilities in my home country.

While reading lots of books I was constantly faced with new, astonishing facts and moving anecdotes. I found a lot of useful literature at the Karl-Franzens university in Graz.

Additional to many books and the internet I was lucky to be aided by Gabriela Fosado, our native speaker. As she is bilingual, she gave me great insights into the world of bilingualism and supported me wherever she could. Besides being my interviewee, Gabriela also taught me how to write an English research paper correctly. For all of this I want to thank her a lot.

Special thanks also go to Gaby’s mum for being another of my interviewees (via internet) even though she lives in the USA.

All in all I want to thank every one of my interviewees, they helped me a lot to get an idea of what being bilingual and rearing a child with two languages mean.

I also want to express thanks to Prof. Prettenhofer who helped and supported me.

Last but not least I am grateful to my family and friends who have motivated me and who have been supportive during the last few months.

Tina Herbst

February 27, 2004
Introduction

Today, being able to speak more than one language is more important than ever. In business life and also in our spare time we cannot get on with being monolingual.

Considering this fact, for parents bringing their children up bilingually might seem the best thing to do. This is at least what I’ve always thought. Raising a child bilingually does not seem very difficult at first sight, but on closer inspection, besides the many positive effects, the problems to be overcome cannot be ignored.

Children who grow up with two languages will be more open-minded and tolerant. These are qualities that are very rare but also very important in our society.

What I soon realised was that bilingualism is a very extensive topic and I could in no case deal with all the issues and questions that arose in the course of my studies.

Because of this, I decided to pick the topics that seemed the most important and interesting to me. In short they include an overall view of bilingualism and definitions of the most important vocabulary. One chapter deals with ways of rearing children bilingually. This seemed especially interesting to me, because apart from wanting to give your child the best start into its life, there are more issues to be considered.

In connection with this I wrote the chapter on problems children (and parents as well) might be faced with. It is important to know in advance what difficulties might arise to be able find solutions for these problems more easily.

I also wanted to briefly present some of the bilingual facilities in Austria.

What seemed the most important to me were the interviews with parents of bilingual children and children themselves. One can read hundreds of books about bilingualism and consider himself an expert, but all of this is theory. What it really is like to be bilingual can only be found out by talking to bilinguals.

Although the title of my work is ‘Growing up bilingually in Austria’, it does not only focus on Austria. Bilingualism itself is international. Most bilinguals are bicultural too, this means they are at home in more than one country. Therefore, restricting the discussion of this topic to one single country is impossible.
2. Definitions

Nowadays, bilingualism is a quite often-discussed topic. Many parents think about rearing their child(ren) with more than one language. This seems like a big advantage for their future. With the EU and globalisation being able to express oneself in different languages is a prerequisite for getting a well-paid and high-ranking job. At schools in Austria almost every pupil learns English as a foreign language.

Many people who come to live in Austria still speak their mother tongue at home, but they have to learn German to get an occupation and to be able to live here, too.

But with so many people being able to talk more than one language, who can be defined as ‘bilingual’? The definitions in this chapter might help to find an answer to this question.

2.1. What is bilingualism?¹

Before bilingualism is discussed, the word must be defined.

When talking to different people, different definitions of the word might appear. One might consider someone bilingual, who has “native-like control of two or more languages”². However, someone else might call someone ‘who is able to handle everyday situations (e.g. shopping, conversation with people of the same age and social background) in more than one language’ bilingual. Neither of the definitions seems satisfying. The first statement does not tell who decides what ‘native-like’ really means. Even in a country where English is the official language and the majority of the population speaks it as a mother tongue, different levels of English will occur. Among native speakers different language abilities in different situations – as a consequence of different upbringing, education, experiences and professions – do occur. So what is the standard someone should have, to be called a bilingual according to the first definition?

According to the second definition, everybody who has learnt a foreign language and who for example is able to order coffee in Greece in the national language would be considered bilingual.

As a result when discussing the topic of bilingualism, it has to be kept in mind that bilingualism in reality lies somewhere between the two extreme definitions mentioned above. For every bilingual person, a specific definition of the term has to be found

¹ Colin Baker, Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, Bridgend: WBC Print, 1994, pp. 7-8
² Baker, p. 7
considering upbringing, social background, education, possibilities to use both languages etc.

When people hear the word ‘bilingual’, many of them first think of somebody, who speaks English and German or French and Spanish. But what we tend to forget is that all around the world, more than half of the population is bilingual. In many African countries there is an official language (e.g. French or English) and many dialects. Children who grow up in these countries often learn two or even more languages.

There are officially bilingual nations (e.g. Canada, Belgium or Finland), officially monolingual countries (e.g. Germany or Japan) and multilingual countries (e.g. Switzerland).

In officially bilingual nations, two or more languages have full official recognition. Very often only a small part of the population actually is bilingual and uses both languages on a regular basis in countries like these, whereas for example in monolingual Tanzania, about 90 per cent of the inhabitants use more than one language.

“In fact, there are fewer bilingual people in the bilingual countries than there are in so-called unilingual countries. For it is not always realized that bilingual countries were created not to promote bilingualism, but to guarantee the maintenance and use of two or more languages in the same nation.”

In multilingual countries, all (or at least some) of the main national languages are recognised as official languages. For example in Switzerland German, French and Italian are used as official languages.

One has to realise that the labels ‘bilingual’, ‘monolingual’ and ‘multilingual’ should be understood as political statements of attitude towards minority groups, not as indications of the actual distribution of languages.

2.2. Language ability

When discussing bilingualism, one has to consider that it cannot be seen as a unity but that it consists of four basic language abilities: listening, reading, speaking and writing.

During one’s evolution, abilities in the different parts vary. Mostly, listening is the first skill to be developed. An infant hears his parents speak and slowly starts to

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4 Harding, Riley, pp. 28-30
5 Baker, pp. 6-7
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understand what they say. Nearly at the same time, the speaking ability starts to develop. The sooner a child gets to know more languages, the better will be its pronunciation. During the following time, the development of all four language abilities continues.

Many children tend to speak only one language during a phase in their adolescence. They feel like being bilingual marks them as outsiders and ‘different’ from the others. Like every teenager, bilingual teens want to belong somewhere and to be like their mates. Knowing two languages and two cultures might seem like a big burden to them. But after some time and with the support of parents and friends, most of them find out that it’s rather a gift and advantage than a disadvantage to be bilingual. Some also benefit from getting to know other speakers of more languages.

Someone may understand a second language, but not speak or read it throughout his/her life. This is called passive bilingualism. In this case, the reading, speaking and writing ability have not been developed at all or only very little.

‘Thinking’ is sometimes considered to be a fifth language competence. It is mainly seen as part of the ‘speaking’ ability, although there are big differences in whether a person sometimes/fluently/always thinks in a language or not. Some people speak very slowly when talking in one of their languages, this is because they think in the other language and have to translate. This might also lead to interferences (see chapter 3.2).
2.3. Equilingualism - Balanced bilingualism

“Someone who is approximately equally fluent in two languages across various contexts may be termed and equilingual or ambilingual or, more commonly, a balanced bilingual.”

This definition seems clear, but in fact, hardly anybody will fulfill these demands. In at least one of the language abilities, smaller or bigger deficiencies will occur. Additionally, competence in a language may differ from situation to situation. For example a child might be able to talk about school with his/her parents quite well in English, but when it should explain a game it has learnt with his/her German-speaking friends, it will perhaps not be able to do so, because it has only learnt the terms in German.

A bilingual person will perhaps be confronted with situation like the one mentioned above throughout his/her life and find it necessary to find a way to cope with it. So balanced bilingualism in all situations perhaps is a utopia.

Moreover, balanced bilingualism may appear in a low standard in both of the languages. Someone may be ‘equally fluent’ in both his/her languages, like the definition demands, but only speaks very little of them.

It can be said that the term ‘balanced bilingualism’ in practise is not really useful, although it represents a common view of bilingualism.

2.4. Semilingualism

“Bilinguals will tend to be dominant in one of their languages in all or some of their language competence. This may vary with context and change over time.”

Semilinguals are described as not having sufficient competence in one or either of their languages.

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6 Baker, pp. 8-9
7 Baker, p. 8
8 Baker, pp. 9-12
9 Baker, p. 9
Hansegard (1975) described semilinguals as having deficits in six language competences:\(^\text{10}\)

- Size of vocabulary
- Correctness of language
- Unconscious processing of language (automatism)
- Language creation (neologization)
- Mastery of the functions of language (e.g. emotive, cognitive)
- Meanings and imagery

Thus, a semilingual displays a small vocabulary, incorrect grammar, consciously thinks about language production or is uncreative in one of the languages. If these problems occur in both languages, this is called ‘double-semilingualism’.

2.5. Dominant language\(^\text{11}\)

A dominant language is the language that is used more often and therefore has a larger vocabulary. In the course of the life of a bilingual, the dominant language will vary tremendously as it depends on various circumstances. If to express one idea in one language, a simple grammatical rule is used, but the same idea requires a complex structure in the other, many children are likely to use the easier structure (for further information on interference, see chapter 3.2). This might lead to a temporary imbalance, dominance in the ‘easier’ language, but this tendency can change anytime.

3. Bringing up children bilingually\(^\text{12}\)

At first sight, the idea of bringing up a child bilingually seems like a great plan. At a closer look, however, one will find out that rearing children with two languages requires much more than talking to him/her in two languages. This chapter concentrates on questions parents should consider before and/or while bringing up a child with two languages.

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\(^{10}\) Baker, p. 9  
\(^{11}\) Harding, Riley, pp. 33-34  
3.1. When to start?\textsuperscript{13}

The first question that arises after parents have made the decision to bring up their child bilingually is when to start. Some begin to talk to their baby in different languages when it is not even born yet. It has been proved that an unborn child is able to hear music and other sounds, even though only at the age of four months it can locate the source of sound and turns its head into this direction.\textsuperscript{14} If a child is used to the sound of a language, this may be helpful in pronunciation when it starts to speak the language.

Experts claim that infants can take up information more easily. Thus, it can only be an advantage to start a bilingual education as early as possible.

This does not mean that it is impossible to teach your child another language later in its development.

3.2. Who speaks what?\textsuperscript{15}

The second question parents will be faced with is who the child should learn which language from. There are many different possibilities depending on family background. Each family must find out for themselves which way is best for them.

Maybe parents have chosen to rear their child bilingually, because the two of them have different native tongues. Such parents may want their child to get to know the two languages and the two cultures. So in this case, \textbf{each parent will talk to the child in his/her mother tongue.} This keeps the amount of mistakes the child might pick up at a minimum. Some difficulties can occur if one partner (further referred to as A) does not understand the language of the other partner (further referred to as B). As soon as the child will be able to talk, and talks to B, A might feel like an outsider, because s/he does not understand anything. This is a psychological problem parents should think about in advance. Maybe A would feel better if s/he went to a language course, to get to know at least the basics of the other language.

Another common way to teach a child two languages can be used if both parents have the same native language. In this case, the child learns \textbf{one language at home}, from his/her family. The second \textbf{one is learnt from friends and when s/he goes to kindergarten or school}. What parents have to consider in this situation is that, by the time the child starts to attend school, it must have reached a specific level of language in

\textsuperscript{13} Burkhardt Montanari, pp. 40-41
\textsuperscript{14} Burkhardt Montanari, p. 40
\textsuperscript{15} Harding, Riley, pp. 47-48
order to be able to follow the lessons. Many kindergarten teachers are not very keen on having to teach a child their mother tongue. It is a big challenge for them to take care of a child they do not understand. A conversation on this issue before the child enters kindergarten can be very helpful. In Austria, there is also the possibility to attend a multilingual kindergarten or school. For further information on this topic see chapter 4.

Somebody who speaks German and comes to play with the child once or twice a week can also be very helpful in improving the child’s second language.

If a family is not sure about the level of their child’s school language, about one and a half years before the child enters school or kindergarten, they should consult a speech therapist. S/he can then find out whether the child has sufficient skills in the language or not. If not, the therapist can help to improve them.

In general, a speech therapist is a good compliment during a bilingual rearing. S/he can help if questions about the language development appear.

Of course there are more ways to rear a child bilingually. The two discussed above are the most common.

3.3. Language prestige and language teaching\textsuperscript{16}

Nowadays it is also very common for German speakers to raise their child with German and English. English is a very widespread language and some parents think their child will benefit from growing up with this language. However, a danger here is, that non-native speakers tend to make mistakes or do not have a very large vocabulary and the child will of course pick up these deficiencies.

What has to be said is that bringing up a child with English as a second language in Austria is much easier than to teach for example Russian. This is due to the value the English language has. As English is one of the most important languages in the world, somebody who is able to speak English quite well is respected and parents will be supported in rearing a child with this language. There is also a great variety of English books, movies, games, magazines and so on available.

On the contrary, Russian (or other Eastern languages) is not a very popular language to rear a child with in Austria. It might be hard for parents to find materials in this language to support their bilingual education. Furthermore, people might not show too much understanding and support for a Russian-German education.
All in all, it can be said that it is easier to teach a language that has a lot of prestige to a child than one that is not very common.

3.4. Distinguishing languages

The next important question is how children learn to distinguish between the two languages. How does a child learn that when it talks to his/her father, it uses a different language than when it speaks to its mother? It always uses words and sounds, how can it know that there is a difference between them? How does a small child even know that there is more than one language?

To make this feasible, parents can again use some different approaches. The ways a child learns to distinguish languages depend on the above discussed ways of teaching the languages.

In the first case, mother and father speak different languages and each of them teaches their child their own mother tongue. To allow the child to make a distinction between the two languages, the father should at no point talk in the language of the mother in the presence of the child and the other way around. In this way the child learns a ‘mother language’ and a ‘father language’.

Surveys have shown that even if small children reject speaking in one language at first, they mostly do understand it. For example, Lara Thomas, daughter of Cris Thomas from Wales and Reinhild Thomas from Germany, refused to talk English at the age of three. She spent most of the time with her mother who spoke German with her. But when she heard the news broadcasts on CNN, she pointed out that the people were talking ‘daddy’s language’.

Sticking to the own language can be really hard, above all, as is mentioned above, if one partner does not understand the language of the other partner. But this is what parents have to learn to live with if they want their child to learn as much as possible in both languages. If they start switching languages, the child will soon be completely confused.

If both parents speak the same language, another possibility to distinguish between the languages is (as discussed above) speaking one language at home and one outside. This can be a bit risky, because parents do not really know how much of the second language their child learns. Again, before the child enters school, parents should make

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17 Harding, Riley, pp. 50-55; Burkhardt Montanari, pp. 31-35
18 Polly Ross Hughes, Spotlight 5/94, Born to be bilingual, pp. 46 –48, Munich: Spotlight Verlag, 1994
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sure that their child has reached a satisfying level in all of the four basic language abilities (see chapter 1.2).

A third possibility to divide languages is to teach the child to continue talking in the language in which the adult started the conversation. So if the mother addresses her child, “Gib mir bitte die Butter.”, the child has to go on talking German with her.

Another way of teaching children to distinguish languages is similar to the one discussed above, this method suggests to separate the languages by situations. This means one language is spoken on the weekend and one on working days. Or one language is for talking about ‘serious topics’, such as school, and one for intimate issues, such as feelings. This can be quite useful for families, where one parent is only at home at weekends.

3.4.1. Phases in separating the languages

It has not been proved that bilingual children really do separate their languages. Some linguists think that children “go through an initial mixed stage and then combined the two languages into one unified system”\(^\text{19}\). Others believe that children “keep both languages separate from the moment they start talking.”\(^\text{20}\)

What is certain is that some children never or only rarely mix up languages. The majority mix them up only at an early stage and then get things sorted out. In any case, mixing languages is part of the learning process.

Those who believe that languages are being separated, divide this development into three phases.

Phase 1:\(^\text{22}\)

During this phase the child has got one lexical system which includes words from both languages. Pairs of words have already been built. The child uses either one word of the pair, or it uses them with different meanings. For example a child might use ‘Sessel’ for its highchair but ‘chair’ for all other chairs. Sometimes, blends like ‘tati’ as a mixture of ‘thank you’ and ‘merci’, or compounds as ‘bitte-please’ are used.

Phase 2:\(^\text{23}\)

\(^{19}\) Harding, Riley, pp. 50 - 55
\(^{20}\) Harding, Riley, p. 50
\(^{21}\) Harding, Riley, p. 50
\(^{22}\) Harding, Riley, pp. 51-52
\(^{23}\) Harding, Riley, pp. 52-53
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At this stage, the child is beginning to have two separate vocabularies. Yet, it applies the same grammatical rules to both languages.

Now the child will frequently use words from one language in sentences in the other language. For example, a child might say, “Mummy, Paul and Tom are in the Baum”.

Another important development is that the child is now able to translate.

Emma: (English/French, 2 years, 1 month) Bye-bye doy (i.e. ‘dolly’).
Mother: Qu’est-ce que dit maman? (‘What does Mummy say?)
Emma: Auwar. (i.e. ‘au revoir’, ‘Good bye’)

Phase 3:

By now, the languages have been fully differentiated and have their own vocabulary and grammar.

Children tend to rigidly associate languages with particular people. Questions like, “Mummy, do all fathers speak German?” are normal. At this age, the child starts to map out her world socially.

Some children want to ‘overgeneralise’ rules to help themselves keep the languages separate. For example, in French, most adjectives go after the noun. Due to this circumstance, a child that grows up with French and English might want all adjectives to go before the noun in English and all adjectives to go after the noun in French.

When the child becomes more confident in his/her use of the two languages, this tendency decreases.

What is important to say concerning these phases is that not with every child every phase is equally long and appears at the same age.

3.5. Using additional materials

A very important factor for language development in general is supplying the child with materials (e.g. films, books, cassettes) in the second language. The language that is used more often is very likely to become the dominant language of a child. For example a child reared with English and German in Austria hears and speaks German much more often than English. Thus, his/her vocabulary, grammar and style will be much better in German. This can only be compensated by reading English books, watching English

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24 Harding, Riley, p. 52
25 Harding, Riley, pp. 53-55
26 Burkhardt Montanari, pp. 22-23
films and talking to native speakers (au pairs, relatives). This can end up with the child being semilingual (see chapter 1.4).

A bilingual child will also benefit from visits to a country where the second language is the official language. Also at times when a language is rejected, a visit can have very positive effects on the attitude of the child. At home s/he might feel alone and strange because of the second language, but in the other country where everybody speaks this language the child might start to feel at home. This will be a new experience and it will perhaps feel much more self-confident afterwards.

4. Problems bilingual children might have to encounter

What has already been found out is that bringing up children bilingually is not as easy and problem-free as it might seem at first sight. Growing up with two languages is a very sophisticated challenge, especially for the child who gets to know two cultures as well as two languages.

This chapter focuses on problems these children and their parents might be faced with.

4.1. Cultural backgrounds

Culture is mostly assimilated unconsciously by living in a certain society. Culture is strongly related to language. However, bilingualism and biculturalism do probably, but not necessarily, coincide. It is important to bear in mind that there is a growing number of bicultural people, who are monolingual. Examples for this are business people who feel equally at home in Britain and the USA, or Irish, Scot and Welsh people who only speak English but still maintain an independent culture.

When discussing the topic of culture, it is important to keep in mind that monolinguals are not ‘monocultural’. They belong to different groups that use different types of expressions and behaviour.

This fact indicates that being bicultural is not only a phenomenon to be noticed in bilinguals.

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27 Harding, Riley, pp. 42-45 and 32-33 ; Andreic, Andrea Maria, Bilingualism: The State of the Art, 1994 pp. 71-79
28 Harding, Riley, pp. 42-45
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“The notion that the same person can be entirely German in Germany with Germans and entirely French in France with French people is somewhat unrealistic.”

Somebody who lives in two cultures will probably show combinations of both cultures. S/he might feel at home in both communities and behave correctly, but his/her double allegiance will be noticeable to members of both cultures.

In general, children from bilingual families are somehow aware that they are expected to identify with two different cultures. An example for this is six-year-old Philip, a French-English bilingual. When he watched his mother preparing spinach, which he loved, he said, “Too bad if little French children don’t like spinach, this lunchtime I’m English.”

4.1.1. Culture shock

When an individual suddenly comes into a new culture, s/he often undergoes a so-called ‘culture shock’.

“Culture shock might be called an occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transported abroad…[it] is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse.”

Symptoms of this shock are a feeling of frustration and anxiety. Reactions to it are mostly the same; the new environment (culture) is rejected.

Consequently, learning a language during such a shock is very difficult or even impossible. However, this does not mean that culture shock is limited to people who do not speak the language of their new environment yet.

What might seem paradoxical at first sight is that speaking the language often makes life more complicated for people who move to another country.

Natives often are more tolerant with people, who are in the course of learning a language. They honour that these people try to learn a new language, support them and tolerate their cultural mistakes as well as their language mistakes.

29 Harding, Riley, p. 42
30 Harding, Riley, p. 45
31 Harding, Riley, pp. 43-44
32 Harding, Riley, p. 43
But one who already speaks a language is expected to be familiar with the culture. If such a person makes cultural mistakes, s/he behaves badly and might not be faced with tolerance. Bad behaviour is not as easily excused as a bad handling of language.

Children can suffer from culture shock as well as adults. However, it is less traumatic and more short-lived with them. Reasons for this are that parents protect their children and, as a result, they have fewer responsibilities to bear. What is also important is that children are more resilient and adaptable.

If one of the parents is already a member of the ‘new’ culture, these problems are considerably reduced. This is due to the fact that from this partner, a part of the new culture is already familiar to the rest of the family and so they can try to imitate his/her behaviour. It is also easier for the family to become full members of the new community if one of them already is.
4.2. Interference

“When two different languages with their cultures converge in an individual bilingualism is the result and interference the consequence.”

Weinreich defined interference in bilinguals as “deviations from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language.”

In practise, this not only means that a bilingual person uses words of his/her first language when talking in the second and vice versa, but also mixes up grammar, morphology, phonology etc.

Different types of interference are distinguished.

4.2.1. Phonological interference

If the one person – one language rule is followed (see chapter 2.2), interference in pronunciation hardly ever occurs. However, as soon a bilingual is not balanced, this might also show an imbalance in phonology. In different languages, sounds and letters are often pronounced differently. Consequently, bilinguals sometimes tend to use the sound which is easier to produce. Secondly, sounds that sound the same can cause problems in articulation when their places in words vary. An example for this is the German and English /ts/. In German it is used at the beginning of a word as well as in the middle or at the end (e.g. ‘Zorn’, ‘Hitze’, ‘Witz’). Whereas in English it is mostly used at the end (‘hits’). This fact can make it difficult for English dominant bilinguals to pronounce the /ts/ correctly in the other places.

A second type of phonological interference is stressing the wrong syllable. Dominant stress-patterns can be adopted into the other language. A French-English bilingual may say “devel’opment” instead of “de’velopment”, according to the correct French pronunciation.

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33 Harding, Riley, pp. 32-33 ; Andreic, pp. 71-79
34 Andreic, p. 79
35 Andreic, pp. 73-74
4.2.2. **Morphological interference**

All kinds of misuses of grammatical structures belong to this category.

A wrong formation of plural forms can be found quite often. An English-German might falsely say “Tausends of Menschen” according to the English rule of forming the plural.

4.2.3. **Syntactic interference**

Syntactic interference indicates the wrong formation of sentences in connection with word order. Even though it does not occur very often, it can be separated into two main groups.

4.2.3.1. **Word order**

As an effect of imbalance, a lack of knowledge and vocabulary in one language, it might happen that a German-English bilingual uses rigid subject-verb-object order in English. But by stiffly transforming sentences from German into English using this order, alterations in meaning can occur.

German word order in subordinated clauses is very complex and not easy to master. The same is true for to the English inversions.

This can cause problems for imbalanced bilinguals or bilinguals who are not offered enough of ‘native’ talking possibilities.

4.2.3.2. **Negation**

Negations cause problems as well because they are very different in different languages. In Spanish it is preverbal (“Maria no va.”) while in German it is postverbal (“Maria kommt nicht.”) and in French it consists of two parts (“Maria ne vient pas.”).

4.2.4. **Lexical interference**

The reason for lexical interference is that bilingual children happen to have a smaller active vocabulary in their dominant language than monolinguals of the same age. This is not to be seen as a lack of intelligence. It is due to less experiences. A bilingual child transfers terms it needs for describing a situation into the other language as well, because it does not know the correct equivalent.

36 Andreic, p. 75
37 Andreic, p. 76
38 Andreic, p. 76
39 Andreic, p. 76
40 Andreic, p. 77
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Even if a child knows two words for the same thing, it will tend to use the phonetically simpler term.

4.2.5. Semantic interference

“When the meaning of a word from the dominant language is (over-)extended to a corresponding lexical unit in the weaker language we speak of ‘semantic interference’.”

For bilinguals homophones (false friends) might cause problems because of a lack of contrast. For example, the English word “sensible” and the German “sensibel” sound alike, but have different meanings that might be difficult to understand for a young bilingual.

4.2.6. Orthographic interference

A study in Australia dealing with the writing ability of German-English bilinguals has shown, that many of them produce ill-formed words because of their instruction in English orthography. For instance, children wrote “Grunde” for “Gründe”, “shrieben” for “schreiben” and “before” for “bevor”.

4.2.7. Cultural and NVC interference

A person who grows up with two languages almost inevitably also grows up with two cultures. Each culture has its own ways of behaving and reacting. What is socially correct and accepted in one culture can be offensive in the other and vice versa. The usage of the word ‘shit’ is a good example for this. While it is widely tolerated in Austria and Germany, in England it is still an insult.

Cultural interference does not only occur in verbal, but also Non-Verbal Communication behaviour (NVC interference).

As a result, bilingual and bicultural people might have problems in finding the right behaviour for a specific culture-related situation.

Interference is normally very short-lived, but it arrives rather frequently. Bilinguals seem to find quite good ways to handle these problems. Even though in some situations they do not know the right words to express their thoughts on special topics, most of

41 Andreic, pp. 77-78
42 Andreic, p. 77
43 Andreic, p. 79
44 Andreic, p. 79
them seem to understand what their opposite is talking about, provided that s/he knows the basics of the issue in the other language.

As can be seen above, interference can occur at any level of language structure or function.

Interference shows that a bilingual is not completely balanced (see chapter 1). This means that interference is an indicator of language dominance (see chapter 1).

5. Bilingual facilities in Austria

So far bilingualism has only been discussed in terms of family. Who speaks what? How can languages be separated? What has become clear by now is that there must be some bilingual support outside the family, too. Thus, bilingual parents might think it is worth finding a multi- or bilingual school for their child(ren).

In Austria there are a few areas that are still bilingual. This is due to Austria’s history of the Danube Monarchy. In parts of Burgenland, Hungarian and Croatian are spoken. Slovenian speakers can be found in Carinthia.

Minority languages are offered along with German in these areas because many children enter primary school without much German.

Nevertheless, due to the increasing mobility, flexibility and globalisation, being able to speak English has become quite important. Hence, there are other types of bilingual schools in Austria that focus on boosting the learning of modern foreign languages.

An example for this is the “Vienna Bilingual Schooling” project. The aim of this project is to provide German-English bilingual education from primary school to the “Matura” in Vienna.

This chapter gives a brief overall view of the different bilingual educational institutions in Austria from kindergarten to high school.

45 http://www.wien.gv.at/ssr/allgemeines/, January 30, 2004
5.1. Kindergarten\textsuperscript{46}

As a project, trilingual kindergartens have been presented in Carinthia recently where children learn three languages and cultures from the beginning.

In some Austrian kindergartens children have the chance to learn English while playing games and having fun.

Generally, infants are more and more faced with the English language in songs and games even in kindergarten.

In Mödling there is a kindergarten that offers a German-English group.

This group was founded in 1999 after two years of struggle with the Federal Government and the local institutions. Parents took the initiative because they wanted a bilingual kindergarten for their children. At first, many children with Yugoslavian-speaking parents came to the kindergarten in Eisentorgasse. In the meantime, the majority of children come from a monolingual, German-speaking background. Most of these parents think that it is a good idea to face their children with English at an early stage. Three teachers take care of the children, one of them is native American. Both languages are used equally, despite of the children talking German to each other. The managing director of this kindergarten admitted that the children are not bilingual after their time in this institution, but they are able to understand and use simple commands like "Wash your hands!". Additional materials such as English books, games and a computer are offered to the children.

5.2. Primary schools\textsuperscript{47}

Members of the Slovenian minority group in Carinthia are entitled to be taught in their mother tongue, in mixed classes, however, there must be a second teacher.

Most Carinthian pupils have the chance to attend bilingual lessons. 65 primary schools offer lessons in Slovenian or bilingually in German-Slovenian. A big part of the pupils take this opportunity. (for further information see diagram below)


\textsuperscript{47} http://www.ktn.gv.at/ortstafel/ortstafel.htm, November 11, 2003
In most schools in Austria pupils learn English from the first year on. The foreign language is used for playing and acting, not as a language of instruction. Therefore these schools cannot be called bilingual.

The primary school in Damtschach has two bilingual classes in which German and Slovenian are used in lessons. Additionally, English is taught from the first year on and, on a voluntary basis, Italian is offered from the second to the fourth year.\(^\text{48}\)

In September 1992 in the 10\(^\text{th}\) district in Vienna the first bilingual primary school was opened. Every class is made up of twelve English-speaking children and the same amount of German speaking pupils. All of them must provide a previous knowledge in the other language.

Classes are given by an English- and a German-speaking teacher and are held according to the Austrian curriculum. Curricula of English speaking countries are integrated to a large extent. Cultural techniques of the country of origin are taught in separate language groups. All other subjects are taught bilingually.\(^\text{49}\)

\(^{48}\) [http://www.vs-damtschach.ksn.at](http://www.vs-damtschach.ksn.at), January 30, 2004

\(^{49}\) [http://www.wien.gv.at/ssr/allgemeines/vbs.htm](http://www.wien.gv.at/ssr/allgemeines/vbs.htm), January 30, 2004
5.3. Secondary modern schools

Vienna and Carinthia have bilingual secondary modern schools. Pupils have the choice to take Slovenian instead of English as a modern foreign language in Carinthia.

In the school year 1995/96 a junior secondary school was opened in Vienna. It is part of the “Vienna Bilingual Schooling” project. The goal for pupils is to acquire and intensify language skills in English and German both for children with English or German as their first language. Two teachers, one German- and one English-speaking teacher hold lessons. Only arts and physical education are held monolingually, either in English or German.

5.4. High schools

All over Austria there are some quite well known bilingual high schools. They use English as language of instruction.

In Carinthia there are higher schools using Slovenian as well.

In the following, the most important institutions are briefly discussed.

5.4.1. GIBS – Graz International Bilingual School

GIBS is an English-German bilingual senior secondary school. There are French-, English- and Spanish-speaking co-teachers and the language of instruction at this school is English. After an intense phase of language acquisition when students enter the GIBS, they should have reached a specific level of English to be able to participate in lessons given in English.

5.4.2. LISA – Linz International School Auhof

LISA is a bilingual type of high school with English and German as teaching languages. Admitted to this school are children from abroad whose parents are staying in Austria for professional reasons; Austrian children who show great interest in languages and other cultures and children who have already attended an international school abroad. English is used as a language of instruction in all subjects.

50 http://www.wien.gv.at/ssr/allgemeines/vbs.htm, January 30, 2004
52 http://www.wien.gv.at/ssr/allgemeines/vbs.htm, January 30, 2004
54 http://www.gibs.at, November 11, 2003
5.4.3. **VBS – Vienna Bilingual Middle School**

The VBS is also a bilingual kind of high school. Its aim is to provide a bilingual German-English general secondary education to a culturally diverse student population. This includes German speaking children who have a previous knowledge of English or a particular interest in learning it; children with English-speaking parents who speak English as their mother tongue or as a language of communication and who have previous knowledge of German and children who attended a bilingual primary school.

5.4.4. **Bilingual business school**

Since the school year 1996/97 there has been a bilingual class at the “Bundeshandelsakademie” in Vienna. This school again is part of the “Vienna Bilingual Schooling” project.

In 1990 a bilingual commercial school was opened in Carinthia. German and Slovenian are used as teaching languages there.

6. **Comparison between German and English idioms**

Every learner of two languages, bilingual or not, is sooner or later faced with the need to learn idioms as they are important components of language. But it might be quite difficult to remember the right idiom for the right situation in the right language because they are often completely different in the two languages.

For example an Austrian person would say, "Es gießt wie aus Kübeln." to express that it is raining heavily. An English person on the other hand would probably say, “It’s raining cats and dogs.”. These two images are completely different and unconnected. How does a bilingual person remember what s/he should say when? How does s/he know whether s/he sees pink elephants or white mice (see below), if s/he does not believe his/her eyes?

Below follows a list of German idioms and the corresponding English idioms to illustrate these big differences.

56 [http://www.grg23vbs.ac.at/So_arbeiten_wir/bilingual_middle_school.php](http://www.grg23vbs.ac.at/So_arbeiten_wir/bilingual_middle_school.php), November 2003
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To send somebody off with a flea in his ear.
It’s the last straw.

These idioms are especially tricky because they can be easily mixed up by a German speaking person. The first is quite similar to the saying “Jemandem einen Floh ins Ohr setzen.” and the second resembles the proverb “Sich an jeden Strohhalm klammern.” which both have completely different meanings.

To lend someone a hand
Bad weeds grow tall.
To keep one’s chin up.
If the worst comes to the worst.
He drinks like a fish.
To laugh up one’s sleeve.
To be down in the dumps.
To make a mountain out of a molehill

The meanings of these idiom pairs are similar in both languages even though the underlying images may differ.

Pigs might fly.
Let’s call it a day.
To be a piece of cake
Once bit, twice shy.
I’ve other fish to fry.

These idioms appear to have nothing in common at all.

She sees pink elephants.
Brass monkey weather.

Sometimes only the content of a saying changes while it is obvious that the two idioms have the same meaning.
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7. Interviews

The topic of bilingualism is not a topic that can be reduced to dry theory. With every child, different problems and experiences will occur. Opinions of bilinguals about their own ability to use more languages and the advantages or disadvantages that come from this special education differ strongly according to the survey results.

In order to give an illuminating insight into bilingualism, it is necessary to question the persons concerned, to talk to bilinguals about their very own experiences.

In the following chapter, interviews with bilingual children and their parents are reported.

7.1. Gabriela Fosado, 23 years, English – Spanish

Gabriela Fosado was born in Mexico and her father always spoke Spanish to her, while her mother talked to her in English. What she found hard was learning to read and write English while still living in Mexico. From her point of view, the advantage of her bilingual rearing is that she is able to communicate with both sides of her family in their native language. Gabriela also appreciates that she now has a better understanding of the two cultures and she feels at home in both places.

Because she did College in English, she finds it only natural that she cannot write in Spanish at the same level she is able to do in English.
7.2. Mrs. Fosado

Mrs. Fosado started bringing up her children bilingually from the very first day they were brought home from hospital. She states they were not very scientific as far as bilingual rearing methods are concerned. As a family in Mexico they spoke Spanish. English was spoken with Americans in Mexico or when visiting their family in the US.

What she learned is that there is a time when children are very young that they do not comprehend that they speak two languages. When they are very young they have a tendency to use whichever word is easiest but this is only for a short while.

She reports that many times her children would be asked to “speak Spanish” or “speak English”. At one point her daughter Gaby said to her, “What do they mean?” Gabriela had no idea of her ability to speak two languages; she only knew that certain sounds required certain responses.

As her children did not attend a bilingual school, some problems occurred when her son returned to the US. His education so far had only included little English reading and writing, but as he was ‘bilingual’ many people assumed that he possessed these skills.

Mrs. Fosado states as advantages that the horizons of her children are far broader than the ones of monolinguals and that they are likely to absorb yet other languages. In her opinion, a bilingual mind knows how to bend, adapt and to accept that not every word or feeling has an exact translation or equivalent.

7.3. Mr. and Mrs. Kristoferitsch

Mr. and Mrs. Kristoferitsch are raising their child bilingually with German and Hungarian. They decided to do so because the mother and her relatives speak Hungarian and the parents wanted their daughter to be able to communicate with both sides of their family. Another reason for rearing their child bilingually was that they think learning two languages at a very early stage is a good training for the brain.

At the age of one and a half, so far no real problems have occurred. For the parents it was a minor problem to be consequent in sticking each to his/her mother tongue.

They did not get help by any specialists.

Mr. and Mrs. Kristoferitsch hope that because of her bilingual ability, their daughter will be more flexible and able to communicate well in other countries (especially Hungary). They expect their child to be more flexible in learning another language such as English or French.
7.4. Lisa Geretschläger, 13 years, German – English

13-year-old Lisa Geretschläger is growing up with two languages. She herself thinks that it is a great advantage in school and has a lot of fun talking two languages, which she likes equally.

Problems she has to encounter are that she sometimes remembers a word in German and wants to know it in English but she cannot remember because she always thinks of it in German.

What she reported as another problem for her was keeping languages separate when she was younger. This is much better now but sometimes she still has problems.

In Lisa’s opinion being bilingual is an advantage in school and it is also great to go to another country where a different language is spoken and to be able to understand it.

The girl has been to countries of her second language lots of times and she thinks that this and her bilingual abilities have made her more open-minded.

Never has she felt like an outsider in foreign countries. Some places seemed familiar to her, like America or Canada where she stayed with friends. In Australia Lisa felt like a tourist but anyhow she had a lot of fun.

Lisa Geretschläger also reported an incident that made her feel privileged to others because of being able to speak two languages fluently. She was in the city with a friend of hers when two tourists who only spoke English came to them and asked them how to get to some specific place. Lisa ended up telling them how to get there.
7.5. Robert and Zita Geretschläger

Mr. and Mrs. Geretschläger are bringing up their 13-year-old daughter Lisa with English and German because Robert Geretschläger was raised bilingually himself and therefore it seemed natural to give their daughter the same chance. Mr. Geretschläger’s parents were German-speaking but had emigrated to Canada where he spent his first 14 years.

Lisa’s father speaks English to her even though he talks in German to his wife. The mother teaches her child German and this is the language Lisa is surrounded with most of the time. Very often they travel to English-speaking countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia. In addition to this they have also got English-speaking friends who visit them occasionally.

During Lisa’s early childhood there was a phase (a few weeks) when the girl did not want her father to speak English.

Another problem that still occurs is that the child sometimes uses words from the other language, especially verbs that she changes to fit into the language she speaks at the moment. Some obvious interference appeared in the usage of wrong prepositions or the use of the English *by* when the German would say *bei*.

Lisa’s parents reported that by now she has become very good at switching languages when the three of them are having a conversation. When speaking fast, the girl uses German expressions when she talks about what she experienced in the “German-speaking environment”.

Alike the other interviewees, the Geretschlägers did not consult any linguist or the like.

Recently Lisa was accepted at GIBS (for further information see chapter 4.4.1) because she could prove at the interview that she is bilingual. The girl herself enjoys feeling at home in two languages and most of her friends admire this circumstance and use her as a dictionary when doing their home-exercises. She particularly enjoys watching sit-coms and films in the original language.

Her mother thinks that as the child does not have an Austrian accent her bilingual abilities will not be a disadvantage.
7.6. Julia Sword, 17 years, German – English

Julia Sword attends the BORG Birkfeld and is reared bilingually. Her father always talks English with her as he is from Scotland. The girl was born in Austria, the home country of her mother. She has never lived in a country where English is the official language but she has been to Scotland a few times. In Scotland she felt at home and when Julia is older she wants to live there.

Julia herself says that her bilingual ability is nothing special for her, it is completely normal. The language she likes more is German because she speaks it more fluently.

So far she has had neither advantages nor disadvantages because of being bilingual but she thinks that her future prospects are better because of knowing two languages.

When asked about the two cultures she got to know Julia stated that she perhaps is more open-minded than her monolingual mates. In her opinion the Scots are friendlier and they do not take life that seriously.

Still, the girl is sometimes faced with the problem of mixing up the two languages. Occasionally, she does not know a word in German and then she uses the English one when talking German.

Julia stated that for her neither language was more difficult to learn than the other. As she cannot speak English very well she would only bring up her children bilingually as the German-speaking part of a mixed couple.

7.7. Summary of survey results

Interviews with both parents and children alike have shown corresponding results. All children questioned are happy and grateful to be bilingual.

What is conspicuous is that hardly any families who took part in this survey were helped by any specialists such as linguists. They were not faced with any greater problems like the complete rejection of a language for a longer period.

The method used most often is the one parent-one language scheme (see chapter 2.2).

A problem often quoted in literature dealing with bilingualism, namely serious mixing up of the two languages was not reported by many interviewees. Those who were faced with this problem stated that these difficulties mostly did not last very long.

For most of the children interviewed it is very important to be able to speak both languages and they want to rear their children bilingually, too. When asked about acquiring both languages, bilinguals stated that they learned both languages equally easily/hard.
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Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that bilingualism and bilingual rearing is a very absorbing and absolutely vital topic that brings up various aspects, theories and possibilities.

For each bilingual, a unique way has to be found to fulfill all his/her needs. Rearing principles and methods can only be guidelines; they are not rules that must be followed strictly. What works perfectly well with one family can be completely unsuitable for another.

To believe that a child can be brought up with two languages without any problems is somewhat unrealistic. Each child, bilingual or not, goes through phases of rejection. Every learning process is inextricably intertwined with making mistakes, according to the ‘trial and error’ scheme. One should therefore not be discouraged by little setbacks that occur in the course of such an upbringing. Parents and children alike can learn from problems they are faced with.

Today, there are many institutions that provide help and support for bilingual families in Austria. Besides linguists, there are schools and kindergartens where children get the opportunity to meet other bilinguals. Both children and parents can exchange experiences and help each other.

Talking to bilinguals one learns that for them it is an advantage in school, business and private life to be able to speak two languages.

For parents it is a challenge but one that is worth taking it.

None of my interviewees has ever regretted being bilingual or rearing his/her child bilingually.

Today it is very important to be able to communicate with people all around the world. Keeping this fact in mind, bilingualism can only be seen as a gift that should be passed on from generation to generation.
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Pictures

picture 2: http://www.goethe-gymnasium.de/angebote/bilingual.htm, February 2, 2004
picture 3: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/.../csj/032202/education.shtml, February 2004
picture 4: http://www.uoregon.edu/~jfanning/literacy.html, February 2, 2004

Diagrams

diagram 1: information taken from:
http://www.ktn.gv.at/ortstafel/ortstafel.htm, November 11, 2003