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*Analysis of two strategies for Italian parents  
raising bilingual children in Italy*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I. CONCERNING BILINGUALISM .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.1 A definition.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.2 Types of individual bilingualism .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.3 Types of bilingualism according to society.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.4 Types of bilingualism according the age of acquisition .....</b>	<b>18</b>
1.4.1 Childhood bilingualism: the development of bilingualism in children .....	18
1.4.1.1.Simultaneous early bilingualism .....	19
1.4.1.2.Consecutive childhood bilingualism .....	21
1.4.1.3. Late bilingualism .....	23
<b>1.5 First Child’s Language Acquisition: the age issue.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>1.6 The bilingual brain .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.7. Linguistic phenomena overview: Speech Adaptation, Code switching, Interference and code mixing. ....</b>	<b>31</b>
1.7.1 Speech Adaptation and Code Switching.....	31
1.7.2. Interference.....	34
1.7.3. Code mixing.....	36
<b>1.8. Myths and misconception about bilingualism .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>II. BILINGUALISM ANDSECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>2.1. Second Language .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>2.2 Second language learning process .....</b>	<b>48</b>
2.2.1. The starting point .....	48
2.2.2 Developmental stages of L2 acquisition .....	50
2.2.3 The role of the L1 .....	51
2.2.4. The notion of interlanguage related to linguistic development ..	52
<b>2. 3 Input and Output in the L2 acquisition process .....</b>	<b>54</b>
2.3.1 Input .....	55

2.3.2 Interaction.....	57
2.3.3. Output.....	59
<b>2. 4 Socio-psychological and individual factors: identity, aptitude and affectivity.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>2.5 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>III. BILINGUAL EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>3.1 What is a bilingual education?.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>3.2 The multilingual international schools .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>3.3 Immersion programs.....</b>	<b>69</b>
3.3.1 Early Total Immersion.....	69
3.3.2 Early Partial Immersion.....	70
3.3.3 Late Immersion.....	71
3.3.4. Success and critique of immersion programs .....	72
<b>3.4 Heritage Schools and heritage bilingual education.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>3.5 Dual Language Schools.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>3.6 Scholastic bilingual education overview.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>3.7 Education at home .....</b>	<b>79</b>
3.7.1 The OPOL option .....	80
3.7.2 The Minority Language at home option.....	83
<b>IV. THE ENGLISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF PADUA: FOCUS ON IMMERSION PROGRAM .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.2 History of the school .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.3. Organisation of the school .....</b>	<b>88</b>
4.3.1 The Nursery School.....	89
4.3.2 Elementary School.....	90
4.3.3. Middle School .....	91
4.3.4 The High School.....	92
<b>4.4. Observation on Elementary school.....</b>	<b>93</b>
4.4.1 Week 1 .....	94
4.4.1.1 Reception.....	94
4.4.1.2 Year 1 .....	96

4.4.2 Week two.....	98
4.4.3 Week three.....	101
<b>4.5 Italian children’s view on bilingual education.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>4.6 Teachers’ view on bilingual education .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>V. THE SECOND LANGUAGE AT HOME APPROACH .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>5.2 The second language at home approach.....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>5.3 The sample analysed and the questionnaire .....</b>	<b>112</b>
5.3.1 Analysis of the data: <i>Background</i> .....	113
5.3.2 Early Milestones .....	116
5.3.3. Questions on the parent speaking the second language.....	119
5.3.4 Questions on children .....	122
5.3.5 Questions about attitude .....	125
5.3.6 Conclusion.....	130
<b>5.5 Approach to the bilingual upbringing.....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>5.6 Bilingual upbringing experiences in other countries.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>Appendix A: The questionnaire .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>153</b>





## INTRODUCTION

More than half of the world's population is bilingual, which means that they are proficient in two or more languages (or dialects). This trend will probably increase in future, with globalisation and the need to be multilingual. For this reason, nowadays, there are several bilingual schools and programs that allow families to provide the possibility to raise their children speaking two or more than two languages, even for those children who otherwise may not have this type of opportunity. However, bilingualism could be reached even if both parents speak the same L1 not only in a school environment, but also in the domestic dimension.

This dissertation rises from a feeling of interest and curiosity towards bilingualism and bilingual education. In particular, I have always considered the opportunity of raising a child bilingually as a privilege and, for this reason, I started investigating the possibility of bringing up a child bilingually in Italy, even for those families who are not native speakers of a second language. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to analyse two methods that Italian monolingual families can choose in order to provide their children with a bilingual environment that allows them to become bilingual and to demonstrate whether this bilingual education is possible even in those backgrounds where the second language is not the native language of the family or of the country. This dissertation deals with the analysis of two examples of bilingual upbringing: the first is the English International School of Padua, and the second is The Second Language at Home Approach. In particular, I have chosen to call the parental experience Second Language at Home Approach, in order not to exclude any method to speak a foreign language to a child and any languages the parents may have chosen to speak at home.

This dissertation has been possible thanks to the opportunity I had to visit and stay for a period of three weeks as an observer at the English International School of Padua. There, I had the opportunity to observe the everyday school routine of those children that are growing up bilingually thanks to their bilingual education. Along with this observation, I also analysed an increasing trend in Italy: the experience of non-native speaker parents bringing up a child bilingually.

Because of the lack of literature on this topic, the Internet has been the main source of information: in particular, the social network Facebook, where I found groups of parents who are sharing this experience. Indeed, when at the beginning of their experience, several parents share worries and doubts in these groups; for this reason, I found it useful to investigate other similar experiences all over the world: through the Net, I came into contact with parents who are facing the same worries and the same satisfactions as Italian families and who share their experience and methods on blogs. I also found people who started this experiment almost twenty years ago, and I found it appropriate to ask them some questions in order to obtain information about the Second Language at Home Approach.

Concerning the experience of the Italian families that enrolled their children at the bilingual school, I analysed three classes in the Elementary School of the English International School of Padua; in particular, classes in Year 1, Year 3 and Year 5. I observed these classes during their daily school routine and then I asked some children and teachers questions concerning their views on bilingual education. These questions were collected through the recording of children and teachers' answers.

On the other hand, concerning the experience of those non-native speaker parents who are proficient in a second language and who decided to speak this second language at home, I chose to create a questionnaire in order to collect data on their experiment. Concerning Non-Italian parents, I came into contact with them thanks to their personal blog, found during my research. In this space they tell of

their success, progress but also the worries about their experiment and they share important or relevant facts.

Concerning the organisation of this dissertation, it is structured into two parts: the first mainly theoretical part consists in a general overview of bilingualism, second language acquisition and bilingual education; while the second is more experiential and deals with the two educational methods available for Italian families in Italy.

The first chapter deals with the definition of bilingualism, which is the first problematic point I met during the writing of my dissertation. Bilingualism, in fact, has been defined by several linguists, scientists, psychologists and teachers who, according to their parameters of bilingualism, tried to define this complicated and multi-dimensional phenomenon. The chapter explores also the different types of bilingualism, a general overview of bilingual brain, some linguistic phenomena and to conclude, some myths and misconceptions that surround bilingualism.

The second chapter handles the difference between bilingualism and second language acquisition, the importance of input and output on the child's L2 acquisition and some socio-psychological and individual factors that may interfere or influence language acquisition.

The third chapter focuses on bilingual education, for this reason, the chapter takes into account the main possibilities to provide a bilingual instruction: multilingual schools, immersion programs, heritage schools and dual language schools. In the second part of the chapter I analysed the type of education that occurs at home: so the One Parent One Language (OPOL) method and the Minority Language At Home (ML@H) method.

In the fourth chapter, the experiential part of the dissertation begins; here, I focus on the period spent at The English International School of Padua, talking about its history, its organisation and the children's and teachers' opinions.

The last chapter of this dissertation deals with the Italian parents' experiences in bringing up a child bilingually. In this chapter there will be also the analysis of the

data collected by the questionnaire and some feedback and experience of parents from other countries.

## I. CONCERNING BILINGUALISM

### 1.1 A definition.

Investigating bilingualism and trying to provide an all-around definition leads to a wide, multiform and complicated domain of research. At first sight, trying to define the term *bilingualism* may seem non-problematical. In modern dictionaries, such as Merriam Webster, bilingualism is defined as:

“Ability to speak two languages. It may be acquired early by children in regions where most adults speak two languages (e.g., French and dialectal German in Alsace). Children may also become bilingual by learning languages in two different social settings; for example, British children in British India learned an Indian language from their nurses and family servants. A second language can also be acquired in school. *Bilingualism* can also refer to the use of two languages in teaching, especially to foster learning in students trying to learn a new language. Advocates of bilingual education in the U.S. argue that it speeds learning in all subjects for children who speak a foreign language at home and prevents them from being marginalized in English-language schools. Detractors counter that it hinders such children from mastering the language of the larger society and limits their opportunities for employment and higher education”

or again for the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, a bilingual is “ a person able to use two languages equally well or (for a thing) using or involving two languages”, and again, the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary provides the following definition: “a person speaking two languages fluently” These definitions are clear and basic if what we are looking for is just an elementary definition provided by dictionaries.

If, instead, we are interested in more detailed and deep information about this phenomenon, than giving an exhaustive definition of this word becomes problematic: it turns out that there is an entire world to discover made of linguistics, psychological, social and anthropological theories, research and studies started in the past and continuing to the present. Over the past century, different authors gave their own definitions of bilingualism. One of the first approaches is Bloomfield’s who defined bilingualism as “the native-like control of two languages” (1935:55); on the same wavelength there is Thiery (1976 in Paradis 2004: 2) who insists that a

bilingual must understand and speak each language like a native in modalities of use, all domains of discourse, and all sociolinguistic registers, that is all levels of formality and informality. In 1953, Weinreich (1953 in Edwards 2004:8) defined bilingualism as “the alternate use of two languages”<sup>1</sup> and in the same year, Haugen (1953 in Edwards 2004:8) suggested that bilingualism began with the ability to produce complete and meaningful utterances in the second language. It could be noticed that these definitions talk about a ‘native-like’ bilingualism and ‘complete and meaningful utterances’: it was and, sometimes, is commonly believed that bilinguals are equally proficient in both languages; actually, they do not speak both languages equally well and this is due to the fact that they usually use each language in different contexts, activities and domains. As Martinet (1960 in Paradis 2004:3) claims, there is in fact no such thing as complete knowledge of any language in all its varieties and in its full lexical range. This is what Chomsky (1965 in Paradis 2004:3) referred to as idealized competence, the theoretical linguist’s field of investigation. A *fortiori*, no speaker has complete knowledge of two languages. In contradiction with these definitions which includes, as already mentioned, ‘perfect bilinguals’, Macnamara (1967 in Hamers and Blanc 1989:6) proposes that “a bilingual is anyone who possesses a minimal competence in one of the four language skills: listening comprehension, reading, speaking and writing in a language other than his mother tongue”. Of course, between these extreme definitions there is a wide range of denotations on this term according to Titone (1972 in Hamers and Blanc 1989), bilingualism is “the individual’s capacity to speak a second language while following the concepts and structures of that language rather than paraphrasing his or her mother tongue”. Hamers and Blank (1989: 7) affirm again that all these definitions, which range from a native-like competence in two languages to a minimal proficiency in a second language, lack precision: there is no clear meaning of native-

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1 He implies the equal use of both languages in every domain. (1953 in Edwards, 2004: 8)

like competence, which varies considerably within a unilingual population, nor of minimal proficiency in a second language. As Hamers (1989:7) continues:

“can we exclude from the definition of bilingual someone who possesses a very high competence in a second language without necessarily being perceived as a native speaker on account of a foreign accent? Can a person who has followed one or two courses in a foreign language without being able to use it in communication situations, or again someone who studied Latin for six years, legitimately be called bilingual?”

Furthermore, these definitions just refer to the level of proficiency in both languages, ignoring all the non-linguistic aspects. For this reason, Hamers and Blanc (1989:6) give a more complete explanation of bilingualism that takes into consideration also non-linguistic patterns. They define (1989:6) bilingualism as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes bilinguality<sup>2</sup> (or individual bilingualism) but refers equally to the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilingual (societal bilingualism). Furthermore, Grosjean (1999 in Butler and Hakuta, 2004:115) considers bilinguals those who use daily two languages and he distinguishes bilinguals who use more than two languages in daily life from “dormant bilinguals” who retain knowledge of different languages but no longer use them in daily life. As we can see, it is fairly hard to define this multidimensional term properly, given that it must be studied within all the different disciplines that all together contribute to form the real essence of bilingualism. For this dissertation, I will adopt a mix of definitions that could meet my own idea of bilingualism that is Mohanty and Perregaux’s (1997 in Bahtia and Ritchie 2004:115) broader notion of bilingual, which corresponds, to the recent shift or focus among bilingual researchers away from the acquisition of formal rules of language and onto communicative skills. Mohanty and Perregaux (1997 in Bahtia and Ritchie 2004: 115) point out the fact that bilinguals are individuals or groups of people who obtain

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<sup>2</sup> Bilinguality is the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication; the degree of access will vary along a number of dimensions which are psychological, cognitive, psycholinguistic, social psychological, sociological, sociolinguistic, sociocultural and linguistic



communicative skills, with various degrees of proficiency, in oral and /or written forms, in order to interact with speakers of one or more languages in a given society. Accordingly, bilingualism can be defined as psychological and social states of individuals or groups of people that results from interactions via language in which two or more linguistic codes (including dialects) are used for communication. Moreover, for this thesis, it could also be interesting to take into consideration Hamers and Blanc (2000) notion of bilinguality intended as ‘individual bilingualism’. The following section will explore the main types of individual bilingualism in depth.

## 1.2 Types of individual bilingualism

As already mentioned, bilingualism is intricate because of its multi-dimensionality. For this reason, researchers have proposed different classifications depending on different factors.

Balanced vs. Dominant bilingualism: this distinction is based on the relationship between the proficiency levels of the respective languages a bilingual masters.

Balanced bilinguals<sup>3</sup> have been defined by Beatens Breadsmore (1986: 9) as people who, in all contexts, can master either language equally well and who do not show any trace of language A when using language B and vice versa. This type of bilingualism is considered as “rare if not-non-existing” (and it is used for those whose mastery of both languages is almost equivalent) because in a monolingual society there are no occasions to equally use one or the other language in all situations of every day life, as observed by the linguists François Grosjean. In fact, if we consider bilingual just those who possess all the linguistic competences in either language, the majority of people who use two or more languages daily, cannot be

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<sup>3</sup> Also called ambilinguals or equilinguals

considered as such: someone, indeed, may just have the oral proficiency in one language and written proficiency in the other, others speak daily two languages but with different levels of proficiency, or in different contexts (such as one language at home and one in the workplace)<sup>4</sup>. As a consequence, Butler and Hakuta report (2004: 115), the dominant (or unbalanced) bilinguals are individuals whose proficiency in one language is higher than in the other language(s). Therefore, if one language is dominant, the other is called by linguists *subordinate language*. This could happen because, for example, in the case of early bilingualism one of the two languages is dominant because one parent is more present than the other. It is well known that in the first years of a child's life, the quantity of input of a language determines the capacity in acquiring that language, so a lack in input causes the development of a language more than another. Furthermore, this dominance may not be applied to all domains, for example someone who is dominant in Italian may not possess this dominance in all fields: when a technical lexicon is required, a speaker may consciously decide to speak in the language he/she normally speaks when treating this topic.

Semilingualism: identifies a category of bilinguals different from those balanced and dominant. According to Baker and Jones (1998: 14), this word, sometimes, could be used pejoratively concerning those who have not "sufficient" competence in either language, so they are neither balanced, nor dominant. More precisely, Hansegård (1975 cited in Baker and Jones 1998:14) described semilingualism in terms of deficits in six language competences:

- size of vocabulary,
- correctness of language,
- subconscious processing of language (automatism)
- Language creation (neologization),

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<sup>4</sup> Abdelilah- Bauer B., *Il bambino Bilingue, crescere parlando più di una lingua*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2008 p.14

- mastery of the function of language (e.g. emotive, cognitive..)
- meanings and imagery.

For this reason, a semilingual is seen as someone with deficiencies in both languages when compared with monolinguals: he possesses a small vocabulary, incorrect grammar and finds it difficult to think and express emotions in either language, as Baker and Jones affirm (1998: 14). This notion has received many criticisms from various researchers (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 1981 in Baker and Jones 1998) considering several aspects. Baker and Jones (1998:14) claim that from a sociolinguistic point of view this term could be used as a negative label suggesting expectations of failure, furthermore, it conveys the notion that the origins of the language underdevelopment can be located into individual factors rather than in external, societal and economic factors that can co-exist with bilingualism. Other observations concern the fact that bilinguals use the two languages for different purposes, and the comparison with monolinguals may be not fair considering the fact that bilinguals are different from mono in their use of their two languages. In the light of that, semilingualism could be associated to those who remain at the earlier stages of development not due to a result of being bilinguals but rather to economic and social factors of educational provision. As Edwards (2004: 10) claims: “we should remember that for all “non fluent” bilinguals (the overwhelming majority) the second language may be weaker than the first which will never reach perfection”.

Compound vs. Coordinate: concerns cognitive organisation of individuals of two (or more) linguistic codes. Edwards (2004:10) claims that in compound bilinguals two sets of linguistic codes (e.g. ‘dog’ and ‘cane’) are stored in one meaning unit, whereas in coordinate bilinguals each linguistic code is presumed to be organised separately into two sets of meaning units. This distinction is schematized in Figure 1:

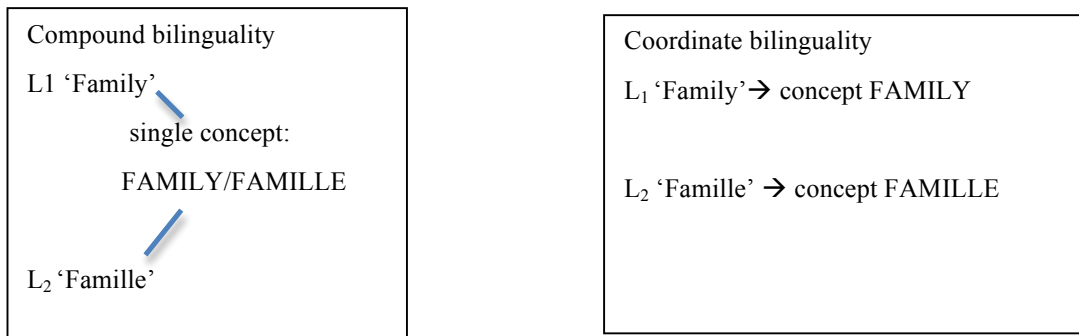


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the compound-coordinate distinction (Ervin & Osgood, 1954, in Hamers and Blanc 1989)

As Hamers and Blanc (1989:8) point out, this distinction, often misinterpreted in literature, has to do with a difference of cognitive organisation and not with a difference in the degree of competence, or a difference in the age of acquisition, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the form of cognitive representation and the age of acquisition; indeed, an individual who learned both languages as a child in the same context is more likely to have a single cognitive representation for two translation equivalents, whereas one who learned a L2<sup>5</sup> in a context different from that of his mother tongue will probably have a coordinate organization, that is he will have separate representations for two translation equivalents. It must be stressed that this distinction is not absolute but that different forms of bilinguality are distributed along a continuum from a compound to a coordinate pole; a bilingual person can at the same time be more compound for certain concepts and more coordinate for others.<sup>6</sup>

Receptive and productive bilingualism: concerns the assimilation of the language learnt. According to Döpke (1992: 3), receptive bilinguals are those who

<sup>5</sup> L1/L2 refer to the first and the second languages acquired

<sup>6</sup> Hamers J. F., Blanc M.H.A, *Bilinguality and Bilingualism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989,p. 9-10

have been exposed at home to a language other than the language of the majority and they acquire a good comprehension of the minority language, but never learn to speak it, or they forget their basic productive skills before their adulthood. On the other side, productive bilinguals are those who acquire a language achieving good skills in reading, writing, speaking and understanding both the languages to which they have been exposed.

### 1.3 Types of bilingualism according to society

Exogenous vs. Endogenous Bilingualism: according to whether the speech communities are present or not in the child's social environment. Döpke (1992: 3) defines an endogenous language as one used as a mother tongue in a community and may or may not be used for institutional purposes (English in England), whereas an exogenous language is one used as an official, institutionalized language but has no speech community in the political entity using it official (English in some African countries).

Additive vs. Subtractive: the development of bilinguality depends also on the sociocultural environment, in particular the relative status of the two languages in the community. According to whether the two languages are socially valued in his environment, the child will develop different forms of bilinguality. It will be additive when the two languages are sufficiently valued, in this case the children's cognitive development will derive maximum benefit from the bilingual experience, which will act as enriching stimulation leading to a greater cognitive flexibility compared to their monolingual counterpart. It is called subtractive bilingualism when, instead, the sociocultural environment of the mother tongue is devalued: in this case their cognitive development may be delayed in comparison with a monolingual peer's, and, in extreme cases, the bilingual children may not be able to make up for this

delay.<sup>7</sup> Further information come from Lambert (1974 in Butler Y.G and Hakuta K., 2004:118) who calls additive bilinguals those who can enhance their L2 without losing L1 proficiency; whereas those whose L2 was acquired or learned at the expense of losing their L1 have been referred to as subtractive.

Prestigious vs. Folk bilingualism: The first to make a distinction between these two types of bilingualism was Grosjean (1982 in Baker and Jones 1998:29). Prestigious bilingualism occurs when competence in two languages (often prestigious majority language) is developed and maintained. As Baker and Jones (1998: 29-30) claim, within a family context, it can occasionally occur when bilingualism is cultivated within the home without outside support. For instance, it can occur when one or both parents speak a language which is not broadly spoken outside the home and which they can decide to transmit to their children for several reasons such as: desire to maintain family heritage, contact with monolingual family members and the educational, social, economical advantages of bilingualism. Folk bilingualism occurs when individual family bilingualism or multilingualism is part of a natural social pattern, for example in large areas of Africa and Asia where relatively stable multilingualism communities exist and this is reflected in the linguistic habits of the family. Of course there are some diglossic situations due to the fact that there is always a prestigious international language (most of time English or French) used in education and official life, but bilingualism of the family is not underestimated because it is supported and maintained by the wider community.

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<sup>7</sup> Hamers J. F., Blanc M.H.A, *Bilinguality and Bilingualism*, Cam Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989 p. 11

## 1.4 Types of bilingualism according the age of acquisition<sup>8</sup>

According to researchers, one of the most important factors used for the categorization of bilingualism is the age of acquisition. This factor, indeed, plays an important part in some aspects of bilingual development such as linguistic, neuropsychological, cognitive and sociocultural aspects. Furthermore, according to Hamers and Blanc (2000) the age of acquisition can be associated with other important aspects such as context of acquisition and use of two languages. The authors say (1989: 10) that often age and context go together; for instance, early acquisition of two languages often occurs in the same family, while later acquisition of the second language often take place in a school context distinct from a family context for the first language.

Linguists distinguish between two types of childhood bilingualism according the age: *early bilingualism and late bilingualism*. Breadsmore (1986: 28) claims that by early bilingualism is meant the acquisition of more than a language in the pre-adolescent phase of life, what Haugen (1956 in Breadsmore 1986:28) calls *infant bilingualism*, Swain (1972 in Breadmsore 1986:28) describes as “bilingualism as a first language” and Adler (1977 in Breadmsore 1986:28) calls it as *ascribed bilingualism*. Breadsmore (1986:29) continues affirming that late bilingualism occurs when the first language is acquired before the age of 11 and further languages are learned at some age beyond this period.

### 1.4.1 Childhood bilingualism: the development of bilingualism in children

Hamers and Blanc (1989: 10) assert that the bilingual experience takes place at the same time as the general development of the child, that is, it occurs at the time when various developmental components have not yet reached maturity and,

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<sup>8</sup> In this dissertation I mostly refer to childhood bilingualism given that the target of my research concern children from the birth to around 10 years old. For this reason I won't treat adult bilingualism.

therefore, can be influenced by this experience. Depending on the exposition to two languages, one can distinguish between *simultaneous early bilingualism* or *infant bilingualism* (two languages spoken from birth and learnt at the same time) and *consecutive childhood bilingualism* (a second language learnt later than the first language). According to Baker and Jones (1998: 36), three years of age is generally regarded as an approximate borderline between simultaneous and consecutive bilingualism.

#### 1.4.1.1. Simultaneous early bilingualism

Baker and Jones (1998:36) define simultaneous early bilingualism as the experience of those children who are exposed to two languages from birth and they learn to speak them at the same time. Hamers and Blanc (2000: 10) affirm that these children develop two mother tongues,  $L_A$  and  $L_B$ , as for example children of a mixed-bilingual family.

Abdelillah-Bauer (2008:42) considers the example of two parents that communicate with their new-born baby: the father would say "*Piccolino mio*" and the mother would add "*Mon petit lapin*". These terms of endearment whispered to the child allow his/her to grow up building his/her language on two different linguistic systems. Although the research on children language perception is just at the beginning, it can be observed that the introduction of a second language in the children's perceptive system entails an extension in their perceptive capacities and this is due to the fact that they must recognize more phonetic contrasts<sup>9</sup> compared to a monolingual child. As Baker and Jones (1998:36) report, several studies have been conducted on early simultaneous children in order to observe the developmental stages of this "educational" method, and, of course, it has been compared to the monolinguals' language development. A recent Spanish research showed that a

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<sup>9</sup> Phonetic contrasts are the differences between articulated sounds.



group of 4 months old children that were growing in a bilingual environment (Spanish/ Catalan) could recognise their mother tongues between other languages. De Hower, for example, observed that the language development of simultaneous bilinguals follows the same basic steps of the monolingual. This researcher, also, confuted the theory by which children's language acquisition moved from mixing two languages to partial and then full separation. De Hower claims that, according to her studies, children of two and three can separate rather than mix their languages. Others like Paradis and Genesee (1996 in Baker and Jones 1998:36) have shown that the grammars of French and English of two and three years old in Canada are acquired separately and autonomously.

Of course, speaking of early simultaneous bilingualism includes all those children raised in an environment made of two or more languages, which would be the ideal background to grow in a balanced bilingualism. Actually, as already mentioned, a balanced bilingualism is very rare; normally, one of the two languages is stronger or dominant because one of the two parents is more involved than the other. This is due to the fact that one parent works more or has a different work schedule than the other, who stays at home with the child, or who spends more time with him/her. It seems that, during the early years of acquisition, the quantity of statements that a child hears is related to the oral production that the child will perform in that language. A research conducted by an American team<sup>10</sup> on 8-30 months old children coming from an English-Hispanic family shows that those children who will hear more Spanish than English, will produce more Spanish statements than English ones. As consequence, their English vocabulary resulted poorer compared to the Spanish one. These children have always been submitted to different linguistic inputs: from 20% in one language to 80% in the other and from 60% to 40%: these esteems correspond to the typical scenery where a parent works and the other spends more

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10 D. Pearson et al, 'Assessing lexical developmental in bilingual babies and toddlers', in *International Journal of bilingualism*, 2, 3, 1998

time with the children. Pearson (1998) claimed that these children, who have been exposed at home to an approximate value of 20% of Spanish, refused to produce words in this language during playtime: for this reason, the authors concluded that children with a low input level in the second language cannot be considered real bilinguals. On the other hand, Abdelilah- Bauer (2008: 46), agrees with the fact that during the early years of the acquisition of the language code and the two languages, the input quantity in each language determines the ability to speak; but she also claims that a child submitted to 80% of English and 20% Spanish will learn to speak in any case, because minimum language input is sufficient to trigger the language acquisition; vice versa, the acquisition of bilingualism needs a sufficient second language input. The authors of the research add that, because of the difference in the language inputs, the active vocabulary (the vocabulary effectively used by the child) is just a fraction of what the child would have learnt if monolingual, but they assure that during the language development there will be moments in which this “language delay” will be filled up. Of course, helping a child in growing up with two different languages and a successful bilingualism will be a hard and long-term enterprise, that requires supervision and care from both of the parents.

#### 1.4.1.2. Consecutive childhood bilingualism

According to Hamers and Blanc (1989:10), bilingualism is considered consecutive when children acquire a second language early in childhood, but after the basic linguistic acquisition of their mother tongue has been achieved. In the case of consecutive bilingualism Hamers and Blanc refer to the mother tongue as  $L_1$  and to the second language as  $L_2$ . According to Abdelilah-Bauer (2008:62), this kind of bilingualism refers to children between 3 and 6 years old, who have already acquired the basic linguistics of their mother tongue language and are fully receptive to these new stimuli. For Beardsmore (1986:33), instead, the ideal age for the intro of

consecutive bilingualism would be between four and five years old, when the imitative capacities of the children are at their highest and receptivity to socialization by means of verbal communication is at its greatest. While the development of simultaneous bilingualism takes place through informal, unintentional learning, say Hamers and Blanc (1989:20), consecutive bilingualism may occur informally, as in the case of the child of an immigrant family, but may also be the result of an intentional learning as in certain bilingual programs or immersion programs. Indeed, as Baker and Jones (1998:40) affirm, there are several ways to achieve consecutive bilingualism. Some bilingual children may learn one language first in the home and another in the community (for example, children in immigrants families who maintain their native language at home and speak the majority language outside, with their neighbours and community). In particular, the majority are introduced to the second language when starting school. This could be very helpful because if children learn a second language in their natural environment, the process of acquisition of two languages will be very similar to the process that occurs in a simultaneous early bilingualism. Children tend to pick up single phrases and set phrases first, concentrate on simple grammatical constructions, over-extend vocabulary and grammar (e.g. using present tense instead of the past tense). Furthermore, transference of vocabulary from the first language to the second tends to occur at an initial stage. However; Baker and Jones (1998:41) continue, from a sociolinguistic point of view, sometimes, a consecutive bilingualism leads to a depreciation of the first language. Indeed, this could happen in particular when a child from a minority language is placed in a majority language school, where the minority language and culture are ignored. Baker and Jones add that this type of situation can be defined as a subtractive bilingual situation, where the introduction of a second language detracts from the child's developing skills in the first language. In this situation, the first language skills fail to develop properly because the child struggles to attain the second language skills needed to cope in the classroom. The consequence is that for

minority language children the development of both languages could suffer. For majority language children, on the other hand, the situation is quite different.

Some parents encourage the development of bilingualism sending their children to “immersion” schools where a second majority language is taught, or to a heritage language school where a minority language is learnt. Research has shown that such majority language children usually cope well in the curriculum in a second language. Furthermore, their home language and culture has status and prestige and will not be supplanted by the second language: this is the typical additive bilingual situation.

#### 1.4.1.3. Late bilingualism

Researchers consider late bilingualism when a second language is acquired after the age of 6 (Abdelilah-Bauer, 2008:81) According to this definition, we can conclude that it is part of consecutive bilingualism, given that it occurs after the acquisition of the first language, which is used to learn the second language. To understand this process, it can be helpful a comparison made by the linguists and psychologists Bialystok and Hakuta (1994): they compared the acquisition of a second language to the restoration of a house, and the acquisition of the mother tongue to the building of a house.

Indeed, at the age of 6, children have already cognitive and linguistic knowledge: for example, once they have learnt to express the concept of possession in their mother tongue, it will be easier for them to transfer this knowledge into a second language. However, some studies (Hakuta et al., 2003 in Bahtia and Ritchie 2004) have demonstrated that, for some structures, the second language develops following a sequence that is independent from the first language. Coming back to the comparison between the second language acquisition and a house restoration, Abdelilah-Bauer (2008:87) affirms that:

“ A person can renovate his house during all his life, but the quality of the restoration depends on several variables; for so, the acquisition of a new language after

the age of 6 is influenced by several extra linguistic factors as the environmental attitudes and the statute of the languages with whom that person comes into contact.”

Given that late bilingualism is part of consecutive bilingualism, the process involved will be the same: the child will be thrown into a new situation with a language never heard, and school will probably be the first place in which he will come into contact with this new language.

Late bilingualism, as consecutive bilingualism as well, develops for several reasons: immigration to new countries due to political, economic, social or cultural factors, a temporary residence in another country, an extended family that speaks a different language or education in a language other than the mother tongue.

### 1.5 First Child's Language Acquisition: the age issue

Researchers have always been interested in the process of acquisition of language. In particular, the acquisition of native language, that is the language a child acquires first, has been defined by Kecskes and Albertazzi (2007:3) as follow: “As described in a neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism (Paradis 2004) the native language is acquired incidentally, stored implicitly and used automatically.” it is something innate that makes part of everyone and it just needs to be activated. Geiger-Jaillet (2005: 15) claims: “ *Tout le monde apprend à marcher, tout le monde apprend à parler, c'est just qu'une question de temps*<sup>11</sup>”. It's just a matter of time, and in particular, researchers have always considered (especially in the past) one aspect of time as important and influential for the acquisition of both native language and second language.

Indeed, as already mentioned, the development of bilingualism in a child is determined by several factors. In particular, researchers have always considered one

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<sup>11</sup> “Everyone learns walking, everyone learns speaking, it's just a matter of time” Geiger-Jaillet, 2005:15

of these factors particularly important in the language acquisition process: age. It has been shown that age of acquisition not only can affect language acquisition itself, but it is “a relevant factor also in the development of laterality which also determines the relative role of the two hemispheres in verbal information processing” (Hamers and Blanc 1989: 42). Age, indeed, is important not only, as we have already seen, to target the different types of bilingualism, but also, it could directly affect the language learning especially if children are exposed to more than one language. Abdelillah-Bauer (2008:9) claims that:

“The period from 0 to the age of 3 is fundamental for language acquisition. (...) Talking to the child during every day rituals (bath time, change of nappy..) seems essential for a better language development. Until the age of 3, direct interaction, with the mother or with caretakers, grants a successful language acquisition.”

An important contribution in this field comes from Dr. Kuhl (2010)<sup>12</sup> whose research concerns the neuro-scientific development of children’s brain exposed to bilingual inputs. She says:

“ From birth to age 7, children are geniuses at learning language. After that, the ability starts dropping dramatically before levelling out at 17 or 18 (...). Baby brains are very sensitive to subtle sound differences and they register how often they hear particular sounds. At 6 months, babies distinguish the minuscule variations in sounds that mark different languages. And they can do so for every language in the world.”<sup>13</sup>

She also provides an explication, supported by a number of researchers, such as Roehrich (2013) for infant early receptiveness:

“In a child’s first years of life, the brain exhibits extraordinary neuroplasticity, refining its circuits in response to environmental experiences. Synapses—the sites of communication between neurons—are built, strengthened, weakened and pruned away as needed.”

This theory is supported also by Grosjean (1998 in Bhatia T.K and Ritchie W.C, 2004), who affirms that:

“Most observers point to the advantages of an early-acquired bilingual competence (...) there are some controversies on when in early life bilingualism is set in

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Kuhl is Co-Director of the UW Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences and Director of the University of Washington’s NSF Science of Learning Center.

<sup>13</sup> Kuhl P. (2010) “How babies learn language: Unravelling the mystery” available at: <http://www.bestbeginningsalaska.org/activities-resources/helping-your-child-learn/learning-language/how-babies-learn-language> (last visited 15.01.15)

train: from birth, from the age of 3?, but early childhood is generally better than anything later. The young brain is more “plastic and flexible” than older one.”

Also Harley and Wang (1997: 29) provide their contribution to support this theory:

“...studies that have analysed long-term trends in second language outcomes have regularly shown that an increasing age of onset is related to diminishing ultimate success. One of the most robust findings comes from studies of long-term attainment in second language pronunciation, indicating that the younger the age of arrival in a second language environment, the greater the likelihood of eventually achieving native or near-native pronunciation in that language. (...) The finding of a strong linear relationship between accent rating and arrival age has nonetheless been consistent, with the youngest child arrivals up to about age 7 typically achieving native or near-native ratings and adult arrivals rarely rising to a near-native level of performances”

According to these considerations, in the past, researchers were led to think that after childhood and in correspondence with puberty, there was a critical period where learning a language would not lead to reach a certain level of proficiency, or worse it would be difficult, if not impossible. In particular, Lenneberg (1967 in Meisel 2004:104) was the first to talk about a Critical Period Hypothesis, claiming that “around puberty there is a turning point for language acquisition” and that “native competence cannot be attained by mere exposure if the onset of acquisition happens after a certain age.” Even if this theory has reached a great consensus in the past, today it has been abandoned by the majority of linguists. Indeed, it is true that children have a brain plasticity that is lost during their growth, but it has been proven that adult learners or adolescents that start learning a language after that threshold, considered as the end of a fast and easy acquisition, have reached a certain language proficiency which is similar to near-native speaker’s one. In fact, Grosjean (2004) claims that:

“On the other hand an early acquisition and the existence of a critical period is opened to criticism. Older learners have cognitive experience lacking in small children and, providing the motivation is sufficient, can often prove they are better learners (...) In the process of becoming bilingual, native aptitude, age and intelligence are less important than a supportive necessity which leads to a bilingualism that becomes natural as monolingualism.”

This statement has been claimed also by Baker <sup>14</sup> (1995:138) who affirms that:

“There are no critical ages in language development. A critical age is when an aspect of development can *only* occur at one (usually very early) time in a person’s life. In language development, advances are possible later in life if they have not occurred earlier. A second language can be successfully acquired from birth or in retirement years. (...) Seventy-and-eighty-year-old adults have been known to learn a new language with great success, making the idea of the critical period absurd”.

However, even if recent linguists and researchers have abandoned this critical period hypothesis, they must recognise that acquiring a second language earlier undoubtedly presents some advantages, as Baker (1995: 138) asserts:

“However, there are advantageous periods. Acquiring a second language early in childhood has advantages for pronunciation. Developing a second language in primary school years is advantageous, giving an early foundation and many more years ahead for that language to mature. In nursery, kindergarten and primary school a second language is acquired rather than learnt. Such periods are advantageous when there is a higher probability of language acquisition due to circumstances, time available, teaching resources and motivation.”

An important role in second language learning is not only played by the age factor, but also by the surrounding environmental of the child (circumstances, time available, teaching resources and motivation), that provides inputs that are necessary to develop a second language in a receptive and efficient way.

An interview (Published on ReVel Vol. 3, n. 5, 2005) made to Dr. Annick De Houwer<sup>15</sup> reveals the importance of inputs during a bilingual acquisition. She says:

“...frequency of input (combined, of course, with age appropriate input, and warm responsiveness) are crucial in both a monolingual and a bilingual setting.(...) the role of the input is even much more important in a bilingual setting than in a 'normal' monolingual situation. The main reason is that in a monolingual setting, what you don't get from some persons in your environment, you'll learn from some others. The input situation, if you like, is less vulnerable. But in a bilingual setting it is possible that only one person is the 'carrier' of a particular language. If that person doesn't talk much to the child, the child will have much less of a chance to acquire that language. People often forget that children don't just learn from the air. In learning to talk, children need to hear a lot of language, and they need to be given the opportunity to speak a lot. This takes a lot of time and effort, both in monolingual and bilingual settings.  
(...) Children need consistent and frequent input in all the languages they need to learn.”

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<sup>14</sup> Professor of Education at the University of Wales, bangor and Director of Research Centre Wales.

<sup>15</sup> Professor of Language Acquisition and Language Teaching at the University of Erfurt in Germany, currently Director of the newly founded European Research Network for Bilingual Studies, ERBIS.



Grosjean, also, points out that, in the development of a bilingual attitude, input and motivation are fundamental factors as much as age, especially in late acquisition. Researchers in the past have been discouraged in saying that bilingualism could be reached also in late acquisition because of a widespread frequent failure in second language acquisition. In fact, Grosjean (2013) admits:

“Many older learners (adolescents and adults) do admittedly end up with low levels of proficiency but this is not due primarily to the age they started learning their second language as such but to other factors such as motivation, time, energy, language input, support from the environment, etc. This misemphasis on poor older learners has distracted researchers from focusing on the truly informative cases, that is successful older learners who spend sufficient time on second language learning, give it their full attention, and who benefit from high motivation and from supportive language learning environments.”

To conclude, being exposed to a second language in early life certainly presents some advantages; however, a bilingual proficiency can be reached not only in childhood, but also in adolescence and adulthood (with different conditions and modalities). Otherwise, Samuel Beckett or a Vladimir Nabokov, would not only have mastered a language different from their mother tongue, but also wrote their masterpieces in those second languages.

## 1.6 The bilingual brain

The study of the bilingual brain is matter of recent research. Normally, the study of the correlation between language and the brain has always had as basic conjecture that the typical language user is monolingual. This conjecture is unfounded if we imagine that in the world there are at least more bilinguals than monolinguals; for this reason, the study of the brain in bilinguals has become source of a common interest among researchers, especially those who work in a neuro-linguistic field. As Baker and Jones claim (1998:83), we are at an early stage of studying how a bilingual's two languages function inside the brain both

independently and interdependently. Abdelilah-Bauer (2008:19) provides a simple and clear explanation on how two languages are organized in the brain, in particular in the cortical areas<sup>16</sup>. She says (2008:19) that language is usually imaged as a delimited entity, placed in a specific part of the brain and that another language, acquired in the same time, is set near that first. It has been suggested; people think that acquiring two languages simultaneously is similar to the construction of two houses on the same land (the brain), by a unique builder (the child) who must work simultaneously at the construction of both houses. The result is that it is impossible to complete the houses at the same time, and in this way, for the collective imagination, the acquisition of two languages leads to an incomplete proficiency in both of them. Actually, as Mechelli et al. (2004) claim, “humans have a unique ability to learn more than one language- a skill that is thought to be mediated by functional (rather than structural) plastic changes in the brain.”

The great part of language is processed in the left hemisphere, except for some linguistic features, such as memory of the songs or poems that are elaborated in the right hemisphere. Anyway, the main question of the researcher concerns understanding where and how all the other languages, acquired in childhood or during one’s life, are elaborated. In recent years, an initial answer has been provided thanks to technological progress: it has been possible to understand which brain regions are “working” when a person talks or listens to a recorder voice. The most used methods to detect these cerebral activities are: a specific neuroimaging technique called Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), that monitors the brain’s use of oxygen from the blood; Positron Emission Topography (PET) that monitors the Cerebral Blood Flow and the brain’s use of glucose from the blood, and Electroencephalograms (EEG) that measures electrical activity in the brain by detecting amount and size of event related potentials. As Marian (2008:23) affirms,

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<sup>16</sup> A large cortical area (in the left hemisphere in most people) contains all the centres associated with language

the starting point of these methods is that the parts of the brain that use the most resources during a task are those that are the most active and involved in performing that task. This detection has been very useful to obtain a functional map of the brain, and also to investigate neural response to variations in language experience, neural flexibility and brain plasticity. Above all, these instruments provide a way to study all those linguistic troubles that occur both in monolingual and bilingual, such as aphasia or language impairments that follow cortical damages.

Observing the brain of late bilingual adults, it has been possible to ascertain that the second language centre of elaboration is located in different regions than the first language centre; furthermore, the activation of these regions is not the same for all the observed subjects. This variation could explain the reason why it exists a great difference in L2 proficiency between late bilingual adults.

On the other hand, as Marian (2008: 24) claims: “studies with early bilinguals (who acquired both languages in early childhood) have found mostly the same cortical areas activated for both the first and the second language”.

Concerning this topic, an important contribution has been made by a team of researchers and linguists that recently studied the effects of bilingualism on the white matter (WM)<sup>17</sup> of the brain (Pliatsikas C. et al, 2014). This innovative study fills an important gap in the structural changes in the brain of two languages speakers. In the past, it has already been suggested that early lifelong bilingualism affects the white matter and preserves its integrity in older age. With this study, this team has proved that similar WM effects are found also in bilingual individuals who have learnt their second language (L2) later in life and are active users of both languages.

As Pliatsikas et al (2014), claim:

“This observation comes from research looking at early and older bilingual individuals who have been using both their first and second languages on an everyday basis for many years. This study investigated whether young, highly immersed late bilinguals would also show structural effects in the

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<sup>17</sup> White matter is a component of the central nervous system, in the brain and superficial spinal cord, and consists mostly of glial cells and myelinated axons that transmit signals from one region of the cerebrum to another and between the cerebrum and lower brain centres.

WM that can be attributed to everyday L2 use, irrespective of critical periods or the length of L2 learning. (...)We propose that learning and actively using an L2 after childhood can have rapid dynamic effects on WM structure, which in turn may assist in preserving WM integrity in older age.”

In addition, Pliatsikas (2015) affirms that bilingualism not only affects the white matter, but also the grey matter of the brain, that is cell bodies neuron organised around the surface of the brain. Bilingualism has been shown increases the volume of the grey matter in several brain areas, usually connected to language learning and processing. He continues saying that these effects are due to the capacity of the brain to restructure itself as response to learning an additional language, but also as a response to the equally important task of juggling between two languages – using one language while suppressing the other at any given time. Thanks to his observation, he arrives to say that it is true that bilingualism “reshapes” the brain, but a crucial factor in the process is played by bilingual immersion. He concludes saying that it is possible that the better preservation of brain structure that has been reported in older bilinguals is simply an effect of continuously using the two languages, rather than an effect of early language acquisition or lifelong bilingualism.

1.7. Linguistic phenomena overview: Speech Adaptation, Code switching, Interference and code mixing.

1.7.1 Speech Adaptation and Code Switching

When a speaker talks to another, a process called speech adaptation occurs. It is one of the most relevant features of interpersonal communication and it consists in “the adaptation of two speakers to each other speech” (Hamers and Blanc, 1989: 147). As Hamers and Blanc affirm, such adaptation can be observed both in monolingual and bilingual speaker. According to this definition, we can clearly understand that this adaptation is strongly connected with the code selection, because it involves a stylistic choice that interests some words rather than others.

Concerning this topic, Van Heuven W.J.B et al., (2008) state that:

“Despite the presence of 2 languages in memory, a proficient bilingual person is able to speak in one language at a time. To accomplish this, his/her language system must select words from the target language, whereas those from the non-target language should be ignored.”

Ignoring a non-target language corresponds to the speaker’s decision to use one code rather than another, in order to maximize the efficiency of communication in interpersonal interactions.

Hamers and Blanc (1989:147) continue saying that once the code has been chosen, the speaker must adapt to his/her addressee by selecting from a range of alteration and modification strategies. Concerning bilingualism, one of the most common and original strategies used by bilingual speakers among themselves is code-switching. Grosjean has given a general but clear definition of this phenomenon as: “the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation” (1982:145). As Hamers and Blanc state (1989: 148), code switching differs from other phenomena because, while the latter involve deformation or replacement of parts of grammar or lexicon of the language concerned, code-switching leaves both intact; furthermore, those other phenomena refers to specialized functions, whereas code switching is used for a wider range of functions and situations. According to MacSwan (2013: 283), we can distinguish between two main categories of code switching:

- (1a) This morning *mio fratello e io abbiamo comprato* some milk;
- (1b) The student brought the homework *pour le professeur*.

The former is an example of code switching in which alternation occurs below sentential boundaries, and it is called *intrasentential code switching*; whereas the latter, known as *intersentential code switching*, relates to the switching between sentences. Hamers and Blanc relate the study of Shana Poplack<sup>18</sup> who recognizes another category: ‘extra-sentential’ code-switching that the speaker introduces in

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<sup>18</sup> Distinguished University Professor in the linguistics department of the University of Ottawa.

his/her speech (tags, fillers...). In her study of code-switching conducted on Spanish-English speakers in an old Puerto Rico community of New York, she found that bilinguals dominant in Spanish make use of intersentential switches, while balanced bilinguals use more intrasentential alternation, so she suggests that this type of alternation might be a good test of balanced bilinguality.

Researchers make a further distinction based on proficiency. Code-switching, indeed, could result from bilingual's competence (*bilingual code-switching*) or from a speaker's lack of competence in L<sub>2</sub> (*incompetence code-switching*). Hamers and Blanc (1989: 149) furnish two examples to understand these types: the first occurs when children of mixed-lingual families use two languages to communicate, the second is typical of certain immigrant populations who have acquired a limited functional competence in L<sub>2</sub> but have to recourse to their L<sub>1</sub> to compensate for their lack of knowledge of L<sub>2</sub>, and vice-versa: it is the case of immigrants who have lost some of their competence in L<sub>1</sub> and call upon resources of the new language they have acquired to communicate with the ingroup and to resort the code-switching.

One should pay attention to distinguish a very similar phenomenon to code-switching; that is borrowing. As Döpcke (1993:10) explains:

“Borrowing takes place when the bilingual speakers lack or do not recall a particular word in the language they are using at the moment, when a semantic concept can be expressed more easily in the other language, or when the word from the other language fits better into the structure of the sentence as it has developed up to the particular point at which borrowing takes place”.

She continues claiming that the difference is given by the fact that speakers are usually conscious of a code switch and they can provide an explanation of that choice. Furthermore, code switching is often marked, verbally or non verbally, and it takes place in appropriate situations. Code switching has been also subject of several studies on adults (Poplack 1980) and children (McClure 1981): it results that there is a positive correlation between bilingual competence and linguistic complexity of code switch discourse.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, then, Baker and Jones (1998:58) say that “monolinguals who hear bilinguals code switch may have negative attitude to code switching, believing that it shows a deficit or a lack of mastery of both languages. Bilinguals themselves may be defensive or apologetic about their code switching and attribute it to laziness or sloppy language habits”. On the other hand, MacSwan (2013: 290) claims that: “Code switching is not universally stigmatised; indeed, in many settings it is regarded as a prestigious display of linguistic talent”.

### 1.7.2. Interference

According to Baker and Jones (1998: 58), few bilinguals speak their two languages with native speaker fluency. It happens that one language influences the other and, usually, the dominant language influences the less dominant. This linguistic phenomenon is similar to code switching and to borrowing, but linguists refer to such influence as “interference” or “transfer”. The linguist and researcher Grosjean, distinguishes between two types of interferences: static and dynamic. Static interference indicates the influence, more or less permanently, of one of the bilingual’s languages in the other. This influence usually concerns accents, intonation and pronunciation of individual sounds: for example a German who learns English, will speak that language with a German inflection which will be very hard to uproot; and, unless he/she has learnt English in his/her early childhood, the accent will be permanent. On the other hand, dynamic interferences occur when features from one language are temporary transferred into the other language. This type of interference can occur at any level of language and in either written or spoken language.

As Döpke (1992: 7) claims, the extent of this phenomenon varies according to several factors such as: the differing ages of the bilingual subjects, the direction of interference examined (the majority language interfering in the production of the

minority language), the range of interferences studied and environmental conditions (lack of language separation by the parents). Furthermore, she reports that researchers are studying the hypothesis on proportional relation between the decreasing frequency of interference with increasing age of the child.

There are several types of interference: phonological and morphological, which, according to researchers, are quite rare; semantic interference is the most common typology and relates to the over-extension of a semantic concept in one language to a similar but not identical concept in the other language; and syntactic interference, which occurs the most often after the lexical type. Concerning the last category, according to Taeschner (1983 in Döpke 1992: 7) the form they take can be traced to the way in which sentences are planned in the other language: it means that the child merely replaces items from lexicon A with items from lexicon B, leaving the structure intact. Another type of syntactic interference is due to the child separation of two syntactic systems, accomplished only after the lexical separation. The choice of one word instead of another is due to the fact that the bilingual child has a greater range, compared to the monolingual one, in which choosing the most simple or preferred words. For instance, a bilingual Italian-English child, to express a dog call can choose between: “*bau bau*”, “*cane*”, “*bow wow*” and “*dog*”, and he/she may say: “dog gone” or “cane gone”, or any of the other combinations. Döpke (1992: 8) also focuses on the fact that the issue of interference and separation occur both as linguistic phenomena and sociolinguistics. In fact, it has been found that bilingual children were able to separate their languages when talking to monolingual of that language, but they continue to mix them when speaking to bilingual speakers. Furthermore, researchers agree on the fact that the preference a child actually shows for one or more words probably depends on the relative number of times he has heard that word and on the pleasure and satisfaction the child can get by using them. To conclude, Döpke (1992:9) claims that this is the reason why a qualitative or quantitative imbalance of the two languages makes the dominant language interfere in the production of the weaker one.



### 1.7.3. Code mixing

Code mixing should not be confused with code switching. As Hamers and Blanc (1989: 149) assert: code mixing, like code switching, is a language-contact communication strategy, but the speaker of one language A transfers elements or rules of another language B to  $L_A$  at all linguistic levels of this language. In particular, in the mixed sentence obtained we can distinguish parts of  $L_A$  alternating with parts of  $L_B$ , which refer to the rules of the two codes. The fact that the transfer occurs at all the levels of a language is used for distinguishing code mixing from borrowing, which is limited to lexical units, more or less assimilated; on the other hand, code mixing transfer, that happens from a lexical unit item to a sentence, is not so easy to distinguish from code-switching. Like the latter, indeed, code mixing is a strategy of bilingual speakers, while borrowing is not, given that it could be practiced also by monolinguals in language-contact situations. Moreover, similarly to code switching, bilinguals may use code mixing as a specific code to express attitudes, intentions, roles and to identify with a particular group. An example reported by Hamers and Blanc (1989: 153) comes from Kachru, a researcher who studied in India. He distinguishes three types of code mixing, obtained by the mixture between the several Indian languages and dialect with three main languages: English, Sanskrit and Persian. The first case concerns the mixture between English and a large number of regional languages. This process, called Englishization, results in a mixed code that is a marker of high social status and membership of an educated elite; people who use this code express power and prestige and it is characteristic of the Indian middle class. Furthermore, in India a bilingual speaker will use a strong Englishization to hide his social, regional, religious or ethnic identity. The second case concerns the mixing between Sanskrit or High Indi with an Indian language. This process is called Sanskritization, can be a marker of caste or religious identity

and sometimes it recognized to be a sign of pedantry or political conservatism. The third kind of mixing is called Perisianization and, while it is mainly related to the Muslim culture, it is also borrowed from the law courts language becoming the marker of Muslim religious identity and of professional status as well.

#### 1.8. Myths and misconception about bilingualism

Although many books and articles have been written both on the theory and on the studies on bilingualism, this phenomenon, especially in the past, has always generated a sort of mistrust and diffidence by collective communities and, above all, parents who decide to undertake a bilingual upbringing for their children. Parents are often concerned about a bilingual education that may confuse their children or that it does not lead to a complete proficiency, and communities, in the past, have often thought bilingualism as strictly connected to diseases like schizophrenia, mental confusion, identity crises etc. (Baker and Jones, 1998: 22). All these doubts have engendered misconceptions gradually settled in general belief. For this reason, during investigating bilingualism, one faces several stereotypes that are very difficult to uproot.

One of the most widespread myths sees bilingualism considered as a rare phenomenon. Actually, as Grosjean (2010) points out that more than half of the world's population speaks more than one language (or dialect) every day. Bilingualism is found in every part of the world; even in monolingual countries there is a high percentage of bilingualism. It has been estimated that in North America, 35% of the Canadian population is bilingual, as is 20% of United States (equal to approximate 55 million inhabitants)<sup>19</sup>. These data have been confirmed by Centeno (2013) who affirms: "Roughly 130 countries out of 195 speak 2 or more languages.

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19 Grosjean F. 'Bilingualism's best kept secret' on Nov 01, 2010 in *Life as a Bilingual*

[...] There are countries where virtually 100% of the population grows up speaking more than one language.”

Another prevalent myth deals with the fact that children might become confused when growing up with more than one language. This is one of the main concerns of parents, who think that children may not be able to make a distinction between the languages they are learning and that in the brain there is not enough room for two or more languages. According to Pearson (2008):

“ From just days after birth, all infants can tell the difference between many languages [...] at that young age, infants generally still have trouble telling two very similar languages apart, like English from Dutch, but by about 6 months of age, they can do that too”<sup>20</sup>

Hakuta (1986: 5) claims that the myth of confusion has probably arisen from older studies and social common fear that that bilingualism per se may cause cognitive confusion.

Another further misconception concerns stuttering. Baker (1995:105) collects the most common questions and worries on raising children bilingually. For years, parents were convinced that stuttering in bilingual children was really caused by bilingualism. Baker, indeed, asserts that:

“Parents of bilingual children tend to focus on bilingualism as the cause of stuttering, rather than looking for other better explanations. Evidence tends to suggest that bilingualism is a rarely direct cause of stuttering. Such evidence as exists also shows that stuttering is no more frequent in bilingual countries than in monolingual countries.”

Theories on neurophysiology and psychology claim that the cause mainly depends on other factors: the former locates the problem in brain activity or in a feedback problem between ear and brain; the latter sees a problem of anxiety, e.g. due to impatient or over-corrective parents. (Baker, 1995:102)

He continues saying that, when this phenomenon occurs frequently both in monolinguals and in bilingual children; it is usually temporary and reappears when a

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<sup>20</sup> Pearson, B. Z. (2008). Raising a bilingual child: A step-by-step guide for parents. NY: Random House.

child is particularly agitated. In the case of bilingual stuttering, it is important not to stop children speaking one of the two languages because it will be counterproductive. It is necessary to make the child feel comfortable with that language, relaxing the level of parents' questions and language demands on the child, or being extra encouraging and patient when listening to the child, and in some cases, moving to monolingualism for a temporary period. He concludes that if a positive and happy atmosphere makes bilingual acquisition enjoyable, bilingualism is unlikely to cause stuttering (1995:103).

Given that bilingualism is acquired subjectively, it requires a period of acquisition that may vary. For this reason there will be children who learn faster and others who requires more time to develop their bilingualism. Another common myth deals with the fact that bilingualism leads to a language delay. Parents who are raising their children bilingually may notice a delay in speaking the first words. As Centeno (2010) claims:

“Language delay is one of the most common delays in early childhood. Because it can be difficult to explain, many people jump to the conclusion that a bilingual child is language delayed because he/she is listening to two or more languages, even in the absence of any evidence to support that connection”.

Grosjean (2010), also, confirms this statement. He adds that researchers have demonstrated that bilingual children are not delayed in their language acquisition, and that one should keep in mind that bilinguals, given that they have to deal with two languages, are different in some ways from monolingual, but not on rate of language acquisition. Abdelilah-Bauer (2008: 107), on the other hand, reminds that the number of words that a 2-year-old bilingual child speaks in one of the two languages is not the same number known by a monolingual child. She adds that if we compare a bilingual child's vocabularies with a monolingual's vocabulary, they do not correspond. For instance, the bilingual child reaches the milestone of 50 words at the age of 18 months, just as a monolingual; however, while the latter's vocabulary will have 50 words, the former's vocabulary will be formed by the same 50 words but split into the two languages (Abdelilah-Bauer 2008: 43). This is not due to a

language delay, but to a logical development that follows the structural patterns of a bilingual acquisition.

The last point to be discussed does not refer to a myth or a misconception, it concerns instead a common belief that is taking roots in recent years: the fact that, according to researchers bilinguals are smarter than monolinguals. Bhattacharjee (2012), staff writer at Science, writes that being bilingual has a deep effect on the brain, it improves cognitive skills, independently of the age of acquisition, and shields against mental disease in old age. While in the past scientist believed that a second language was an interference for intellectual development, nowadays it has been demonstrated that this interference has positive aspects forcing the brain to solve internal conflicts: this is due to the fact that in the bilingual's brain both language systems are active even when using just one language, thus creating situations where one system obstructs the others. A study led by Byalistok and Martin-Rhee (2004) showed that bilinguals seem to be more adept than monolinguals at solving certain kinds of mental puzzles.

Furthermore, Bhattacharje (2012) argues that:

“The collective evidence from a number of such studies suggests that the bilingual experience improves the brain's so-called executive function — a command system that directs the attention processes that we use for planning, solving problems and performing various other mentally demanding tasks. These processes include ignoring distractions to stay focused, switching attention wilfully from one thing to another and holding information in mind — like remembering a sequence of directions while driving”

She continues claiming that the main difference between bilinguals and monolinguals lies on an enhanced ability to monitor the environment. In fact, bilinguals have to switch languages quite often and to do this it is necessary to keep track of changes around them. This is also supported by a study led by Albert Costa (2011), a researcher of the University of Pompeu Fabra (Spain), who, comparing German-Italian bilinguals with Italian monolinguals on monitoring tasks, discovers that bilingual subjects not only performed better, but they also did so with less

activity in parts of the brain involved in monitoring, indicating that they were more efficient at it. Bhattacharjee (2012) adds that bilingualism also influences the elderly (not only those who acquired bilingualism in early childhood, but also those who acquired a second language later). A recent study conducted at the University of California, found that “ bilinguals were more resistant than others to the onset of dementia and other symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease: the higher the degree of bilingualism, the later the age of onset”.

After this general exploration of the bilingual world, in the next chapter we will treat a particular aspect of bilingualism, which is the difference between bilingualism and second language acquisition.



## **II. BILINGUALISM AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Bilingualism is often associated with second language acquisition. As one can notice, these two words are often intended as referring to the same concept; indeed, the term bilingualism is often interchanged with the term second language learning/acquisition (SLA). However, sometimes, it also occurs that these two words are considered as different phenomena, for this reason they are analysed in different chapters of the same book (see Hamers and Blanc 1989). Given that bilingualism has already been discussed in the previous chapter, it remains to understand what linguists mean when talking about second language acquisition, and see if the difference lies only at a terminological level or if the two terms are effectively different.

### **2.1. Second Language**

An interesting evaluation of second language acquisition has been made by Gass and Glew (2008), who have written an article on second language acquisition and bilingualism. They claim that (2008: 266) second language is a vague term that refers not only to the second language effectively acquired, but, in general to a third, fourth language. In a strict sense, second language acquisition refers to a language, which is acquired in the environment where it is effectively spoken; whereas it is called foreign language, a language acquired where the native language (not the target language) is spoken, even if sometimes, talking broadly, the term second language acquisition frequently covers also the area of the foreign language acquisition.



Gass and Glew (2008: 267) discuss the notion of speaker considered the main actor in linguistic development; furthermore, they also list different types of speakers depending on the way of acquisition of a second language.

- Native Speaker: a person who, having learned the language in question from birth, has fully acquired full competence in that language. This definition has been topic of controversy between linguists who have different point of view in considering who a native speaker is. For example, in 1895, Paikeday published an attack on the native speaker in his book “The Native speaker is dead!” and this negative criticism has been supported by linguists as: Braine (1999), Edge (2006), Holliday (2008). Even Chomsky (1985 in Paikeday, 1985) made a criticism on the definition of native speaker claiming: “the question of what are the “languages” or “dialects” attained and what is the difference between ‘native’ and ‘non native’ is just pointless”.

On the other hand, Davies (1991, 2003 in Gass and Glew 2011:267) recognises that this definition could be ambiguous and interpreted in different ways: in particular, when speakers acquire a language from a very young age, the distinction between native and near native speaker is ambiguous. Davies still believes in the existence of a native-speaker entity and, to support his thesis, he provides (2013: 3) some features that define a native-speaker and that we could sum up into: the acquisition of a first language (L1) in childhood; the intuitions about his/her individual grammar; intuitions about those features of the Standard Language grammar that is distinct from his/her individual grammar; capacity to produce fluent spontaneous discourse (he/she shows a wide range of communicative competence in production and comprehension), the unique capacity to write creatively; and the unique capacity to interpret and translate into the first language (L1). These definitions, which represent two extremes (Paikeday on the one hand and Davies on the other hand), contribute to clarify the idea of what a native speaker is. Of course, it is an existing entity but it is not necessary that a

native speaker fulfils all the features described by Davies, to be considered as such. For example, it should not be necessary that a native speaker to be considered native can be able to interpret and translate into his mother tongue.

As one can see, there is a certain controversy in finding the extremes that define who is a native speaker of what. According to Gass and Glew (2008: 267) “individuals may begin their life as native speakers of one language and then at a certain point of their life find themselves in a different environment where use of the native language is severely limited”.

- Near-native speaker: is closely related to native speaker. A near-native speaker could be defined as someone who speaks a language as well as a native speaker (except for pronunciation). Gass and Glew (2008: 267) pose the question about the extent to which an adult learner can structure and organise his/her second or third language in a way that a native speaker does; in few words, they ask if a non-primary language acquisition can be complete as a primary language acquisition. This question has been asked in other words by Davies (2013: 4) who asked if a non-native speaker can become a native speaker. His answer is “yes” as long as the practice required, based on the model of child L1-acquirer who for five or six year spends much of his/her time learning language alone, is so great that it is not likely that many second language learners become native speakers of their target language. On the other hand, Davies (2013: 4) points out that:

“It is difficult for an adult non-native speaker to become a native speaker of a second language precisely because I define a native speaker a person who has early acquired the language. However, the limitation imposed by the later acquisition, when it is very successful, are likely to be psycholinguistic rather than sociolinguistic. The adult non-native speaker can acquire the communicative competence of the native speaker; s/he can acquire the confidence necessary to membership. What is more difficult is the cognitive problem, to gain the speed and the certainty of knowledge relevant to judgements of grammaticality.”

Other contributions to the attempt of defining the word ‘near-native speaker’, come from White and Genesee (1996:242 in Gass and Glew 2011:267) who described ‘near-native speaker’ as nearly indistinguishable from native speaker; furthermore, Sorace (1993:35) determines near-native speaker as someone who accomplishes native-like performances from the point of view of accuracy (except phonological) and fluency. Gass and Glew (2011: 268) underline that a practical and theoretical distinction is necessary in order to provide an accurate definition of this term. Practically, in everyday conversation, near-native speakers are distinguishable from native speakers only in small ways; technically, near-native speakers could be indistinguishable from native in casual conversation, but, at the same time, they may differ in subtle ways. The authors claim that if this difference is unimportant from a speaking point of view, it becomes important from a linguistic point of view, when trying to determine L2 proficiency.

- Advanced Language Learner is another term used by some researchers to indicate near-native speakers. However, other researchers, such as Bardovi-Harlig (2004 in Gass and Glew 2011:268), studied some features that an advanced learner should have to be considered as such. The most relevant are the length of stay in a L2 country (5-7 years), length of residence (about 2 years), the years of study in language program (enrolment in literature and linguistics courses), use of that language in specific contexts (International faculties using English for communication), Test scores (TOEFL scores more than 525). Certainly, these criteria should be discussed, given that, according to Gass and Glew (2011: 269) these values range from vague to contradictory, or, are non-compatible (length of stay with the length of residence).

- Heritage Language speaker is generally a second language speaker who speaks particular language such as immigrant or indigenous. According to Fishman (2001 in Gass and Glew 2011:269), these speakers are those who have been exposed to a language of personal connection. As Gass and Glew (2008:269) affirm, heritage language speaker has started to be matter of investigation only recently; in fact, according to Valdès (2001 in Gass and Glew 2011), until 1996, heritage speakers of Spanish were indicated as native speakers of Spanish. Valdès (2005: 411) claims also that these heritage languages are spoken by groups often defined as linguistic minorities, who are concerned about maintaining and handing down their own language. These minorities include populations who are either indigenous to a particular region of a present-day nation (e.g. Aborigines in Australia, speakers of Breton in France..) or populations that have migrated to countries others than their own country of origins (e.g. Mexicans in the United States, Turks in Germany...). Valdès (2005: 411) continues saying that because these speakers may acquire and use two or more languages in order to meet their everyday communicative needs, they have also been called as circumstantial bilinguals/multilinguals. He also highlights the need of these linguistic minorities to preserve their heritage language; for this reason, recently, many heritage schools have been created in all over the world. There will be discussed in the next chapter.
  
- Bilinguals have been already defined in the previous chapter, however, they are interpreted differently in the field of second language acquisition. According to Gass and Glew (2011: 270), second language researchers refer to bilinguals as those who are the equivalent of native speakers of two languages. However bilingualism is connected to second language acquisition, in fact, Bhatia (2004: 5) talks about “the process of second language acquisition, of becoming bilingual”: in this case bilingualism is

considered as the end point, the aim of second language acquisition. On the other hand, Edwards (2004:7) affirms that one is bilingual at any point of his/her second language acquisition process. As anticipated, some researchers such as Kroll and Sunderman (2003) make a distinction between second language learners and bilinguals. They refer to skilled adult bilinguals as the equivalent of advanced adult learners. Although many articles and book have been written, it could be notices how this term is controversial; for this reason it is matter of continue research.

## 2.2 Second language learning process

According to Hamers and Blanc (1989: 216), the first studies on bilingual acquisition and second language learning, were carried out in the first decades of XX century. Actually, these studies were conducted at a time when no language-acquisition theory was available; so the descriptions we have tell us very little about the development of a L2 acquisition. Only recently have researchers dedicated their study to understand the development of L2 acquisition, asking whether or not this acquisition follows developmental stages; and, if this occurs, they investigated the stages, taking into consideration whether these L2 stages have been the same studied in L1 acquisition.

### 2.2.1. The starting point

As already asserted, children have an innate capacity to acquire human language. Chomsky (1981 in Gass and Glew 2011:275) and other nativist linguists agree with this statement; for example, Gass and Glew (2011:275) who assert that as all children, barring any physical impairment, eventually learn to walk, human children, barring any language impairment or other circumstances, become proficient

speakers of their native language. They also add that children, regardless of the language they are learning, roughly follow timetables and stages. For example, a Chinese child learning Chinese will begin babbling, utter his first word and making his first two-words sentences at the same age than a child in Italy learning Italian. This is due to a biological endowed capacity for language acquisition that includes linguistic principles that provide limits or constraints on how human language can be built. These innate principles have also been called “Universal Grammar”<sup>21</sup> by linguists: in particular, Chomsky (1965 in Butler and Hakuta 2004: 121) was one of the first to develop the theory of this framework that explains why children can acquire (not only imitate) languages despite insufficient input. He proposed that all human beings are equipped with this innate ability to access unconscious knowledge of grammar. He successfully added (1981 in 2004:121) that Universal Grammar involves a series of principles, some of which are universal, and parameters that are considered as the base of the language acquisition.

This intrinsic grammar helps children to develop a complete linguistic system in a much easier way. This speech has always been made referring to children, but, recently, the role that Universal Grammar plays in second language learner and adults L2 learner has become topic of interest and research. Gass and Glew (2011: 276) report that second language researchers have taken positions on all sides of this topic. One front (Epstein, Flynn & Marthardjono, 1996 in Gass and Glew 2011) claims that universal grammar is available to second language learners in the same way it is to the child first language learners; another front ( Schwartz and Sprouse, 1996; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1996, in Gass and Glew 2011) suggests that, while it is possible that adult learners are still able to access universal grammar to help the acquisition process, L2 learners’ behaviour indicates that the language acquisition process may be different for an adult than for a child learning his first

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<sup>21</sup> Universal Grammar refers to the innate ‘knowledge’ of L1 learners at the initial stage of the L1 development. (Meisel, in 2004: 106)

language, due to the remarkable fact that adult or second language learners have already acquired a first language. In fact, rules and conventions of the first language could play an important role in stages of acquisition process because they are employed to context the new language. Another front (Pienemann 1989, in Gass and Glew 2011) suggests that, instead of being based on universal grammar, second language learners start the process by equating the new language grammar with that of the first language, and then rely on universal grammar principles and parameters to guide the subsequent learning process. As one can observe, there are different points of view on this topic that is still surrounded by discussion and controversy.

### 2.2.2 Developmental stages of L2 acquisition

Hamers and Blanc (1989: 217) report that several studies conducted by teams of researchers agree on the existence of the developmental sequence in the L2 acquisition process. These sequences attainment has resulted to be universal, although, minor differences are reported in the order a feature has been acquired. Hatch (1983 in 1989: 217), for example, collected data from some forty cases in English as L2, and he concluded that the development of *wh*-question is similar for all subjects. Other studies<sup>22</sup> supported the universality of the developmental stages, observing other features of L2 acquisition such as negation, phrase structure, word order, plurality, tense and aspect, determiners and possessives. Looking at these results, researchers investigated whether the order of acquisition of grammatical features is the same for all L2 learners. Several studies (McLaughlin 1984 in 1989:218) have been conducted on morphemes, especially on the accuracy of grammatical morpheme in L2 learners. It turned out that the children (Spanish and Chinese speaking) of different language backgrounds learning English acquired grammatical morphemes in a similar order. However, they pointed out that they were used to learn groups of features rather than one feature at a time, and that acquisition

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<sup>22</sup> Dulay, Burt & Krasheen, 1982; Hatch, 1983; McLaughlin, 1984 (Hamers and Blanc, 1989)

of different features may overlap. The studies conducted on morphemes acquisition score a black mark against the critical period hypothesis (see section 1.5), given that adult learners seem to show similar acquisition sequence to those acquired by young. A research done by Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974 in Hamers and Blanc 1989: 218), studied the acquisition of English morphemes by 73 adults from 12 different language backgrounds and showed that these acquisitions followed the same steps observed in young learners. Despite these studies, Hamers and Blanc (1989: 218) claim also that the L2 acquisition sequence is independent of learners' age and mother tongue, since, as already mentioned, language acquisition is influenced not only by age but by a number of other factors. Ellis (1985 in Hamers and Blanc 1989: 218) defines four developmental stages: the first is characterised by a standard word order and propositionally reduced utterances; in the second, learners expand their propositions in order to include more sentence constituents, and vary word order on the L2 model; in the third step morphemes are used systematically and meaningfully; the fourth consists of complex sentence structures. According to Hamers and Blanc (1989: 218), in the acquisition of an L2, another peculiar aspect is represented by the frequent use of formulaic speech and prefabricated routines, e.g. "You shut up!" The former are expressions learned as a whole and they are considered as the basis for creative speech when the learner starts his/her acquisition.

### 2.2.3 The role of the L1

In the acquisition of a second language an important role is played by the correlation between the speaker's first language and his/her new language. In past years, especially in the 50s and 60s, language acquisition was considered a process of habit formation and L1 was seen as the most important factor thanks to which the acquisition process of L2 would be possible. The main thought, in fact, was that the learners automatically relied on rules of the L1 and applied them to the L2 context;



then, an automatic process of language learning eliminates the inappropriate L1 rules and maintains the appropriate forms. According to Gass and Glew (2011:277): “Proficient speakers of L2 which whom the learners interacted, such as language teacher, facilitated acquisition by providing positive modelling and reinforcement of good language habits as well as negative reinforcement, such as error connection”.

That explains why L1 is important for both facilitation and interference: the former, in sense of transfer, generated by features of L2 similar to those of L1 that the learner can acquire without difficulty; and the latter caused by L1 rule (where L2 features differ from those of L1), considered as bad habit that need to be eliminated by the learner.

As research and studies on language development progressed, linguists focused more on the role of L1 in the SLA process; furthermore researchers claimed that all areas of language, grammar, pronunciation, rules of language use, word formation and even writing, have features that a learner takes form the L1 and applies to the L2 context.

An important contribution comes from Kellerman (1977, 1978 & 1978 in Gass and Glew 2011:278) who challenged the previous thoughts, claiming that transfer is not an automatic process. On the contrary; learners have the ability to judge similarities and differences between the L1 and the L2, that determines which language features are transferable to the L2 and which are not. Gass and Glew (2011: 278) report that nowadays, the role of theL1 has evolved: its influence is seen as a complex process affected by other factors, such as perceived similarity, the transparency of a given feature and the perception of distance between the L1 and the L2.

#### 2.2.4. The notion of interlanguage related to linguistic development

In the previous paragraph we discussed the role of the L1 in L2 acquisition, and we have seen how L2 production may be affected by transfer from L1. In some

cases, a child learning a second language after having acquired a first can run into a language phenomenon that interests the acquisition of a second language: interlanguage.

According to Gass and Glew (2011: 111) interlanguage is defined as a linguistic system situated at some point between the native language and the target language. They continue (2011:272) considering that as children create a linguistic system, learning their first language, adults or second language learners also create a system that is mainly unconscious. This developing language system is also called interlanguage.

As one can see, Gass and Glew consider interlanguage as a notion directly related to that of linguistic development and necessary to understand the stages of L2 development; a sort of language in evolution. In fact, they define interlanguage as dynamic, systematic, provided with stages of development, prefabricated patterns and the possibility of learners to regress.

On the other hand, Selinker theorised the interlanguage hypothesis (1972 in Butler and Hakuta 2004: 130) considering interlanguage as an intermediate system that emerged during the process of L2 acquisition and that differed from the L1 acquisition process. He also claimed (1972 in Hamers and Blanc 1989: 225) that interlanguage is a separate linguistic system resulting from the learner's attempt to produce the target language; it is composed by rules built on different strategies, e.g. simplification, overgeneralisation and transfer. This phenomenon is a complex of different types of rules, that is why L2 acquisition has also been considered a cognitive learning process, and proficiency in L2 is the expression of a competence rather than the ability to answer a given stimulus with a set of responses (Hamers and Blanc, 1989:226).

A particular feature of interlanguage is fossilization, defined by Schrauf (2011: 111) as a sort of plateau effect that occurs during second language acquisition and results in interlanguage. Furthermore, Selinker (1972 in Hamers and Blanc 1989: 226) considers this phenomenon as intermediate between L1 and the target language, and

the rules used in this interlanguage come from three different sources: mother tongue, acquired knowledge of target language and cognitive process of L2 learning. Fossilisation, it has been noticed, does not occur in L1 learning, but it exists when learner's interlanguage stops to evolve towards native-like norms, without taking into account L2 input. Normally, fossilisation occurs with adult learners; however, Selinker, Swain and Dumas (1975 in Hamers and Blanc 1989: 226) extended this phenomenon also to young learners, who learn a second language in environments where native speakers of the target language are absent, such as in the French immersion school in anglophone Canada. At any rate, this extension of the phenomenon is relative, in the sense that in many immersion schools fossilization does not occur. When talking about fossilization in learners, one should take into account several factors; not only linguistic, but also sociolinguistic and psychological factors that probably have influenced second language learning development more than the absence of native speakers.

### 2. 3 Input and Output in the L2 acquisition process

In second language acquisition there is the traditional distinction between incidental and intentional acquisition: the former is considered "acquisition", the latter is considered "learning". In incidental acquisition learners have the ability to pick up L2 items and rules while their attention is focused on trying to understand and convey a message without any conscious intention of doing so; on the other hand, in intentional learning, learners focus on the linguistic code in order to deliberately learn new L2 items and rules. (Ellis, 1999: 35-36). While the latter uses contextual interfering and mnemonic strategies, combined with a methodology in learning; the former is triggered by factors crucial for the development of the second language itself. Linguists call these factors input and output. Sometimes, intentional and incidental acquisition are closely related, because even where there is intention to learn, there are unconscious mechanisms triggered by input.

### 2.3.1 Input

Gass and Glew (2011: 280) report the common belief about second language learning, especially in a classroom context, that it proceeds best with teachers, through books and materials, presenting new linguistic information. Theory is always followed by practice, in which learners use this new information to reinforce what they have already acquired. Learning, in fact, involves a complex interaction of information, language use and feedback that allows learners to actively create interlanguages with relevant information from the input. Gass and Glew (2011: 280) define input as:

“ the linguistic data that learners are exposed to as they are learning another language. These data are available through reading or listening (or signing in the case of sign languages). Another term used for input is positive evidence, which come from Universal Grammar framework and refers to the linguistic information that is used to create a grammar. One could say that input is the most important part of the process because languages are not learned in a vacuum and language learning cannot take place without input”

In addition Ellis (1999: 46) claims that input factors are formal in nature; they reflect the ways in which the speech addressed to L2 learners is simplified. There are inputs of different nature, depending on the proficiency level of the learners. Kleifgen (1985 in Gass and Glew 2011:281), he finds some differences in the way a teacher refers to different children in a class.

To a NS group of kindergarten children: There are babysitters taking care of babies. Draw a line from Q to q. From S to s and then trace.
To a single NS: Now Johnny you have to make a great big pointed hat
To an intermediate level NS of Urdu: Now her hat is big. Pointed.
To a low intermediate level NS of Arabic.: See hat? Hat is big. Big and Tall

To a beginning level NS of Japanese: Big, big, big hat
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Figure 2. Talk to a Kindergarten Class (Kleifgen, 1985 in Gass and Glew, 2008 in 2011: 281)

It can be noticed how the teacher's syntactic difficulty and level of vocabulary decrease with the lowering of the language level: she uses slower rate, clearer articulation, differences in vocabulary and simpler syntax. One factor that triggers learning is, indeed, comprehension: by hearing simplified speeches, the second language learner will be better able to understand. However, as Gass and Glew (2011: 281) state, understanding alone does not guarantee that the learning will occur; it does set the scene to enable learning to take place.

Another important input is frequency of occurrence, even if, in some cases it has never been mentioned as an influencing factor. Ellis (2002 in Gass and Glew 2011: 281) affirms that learners are sensitive to the frequency of exemplars as they abstract regularities from input. He states (2002 in Gass and Glew 2011:281) "Frequency is a necessary component of theories of language acquisition and processing. (...) Learners analyse the language input that they are exposed to; practice makes perfect".

In fact, Ellis (1999: 46) reports that the number of encounters learners have with words is a major factor in whether they learn it or not. Several studies have been made on this topic; the oldest observation has been made by Kachru (1962 in Ellis 1999:46), who found that words that occurred seven or more times in the book used by students were known most; on the other hand words that occurred only one or two times were not known by most of the learners. Twenty years later, Palmberg (1987 in Ellis 1999: 46) supported this study, stating that the vocabulary remembered by the beginners of an English course in Sweden reflected the frequency of the items in the book. This is not only valuable for reading, in fact, Eller, and Brown (1988 in Ellis 1999: 46) investigated the effects of listening to stories and the result is that, even in this case, frequency is an important factor. Ellis (1999:46) asks also whether the

relationship between frequency and word learning is monotonic (whether the more frequent the word is, the more the learner learns and the greater is the depth of his learning) or if there is a threshold effect operating (i.e. the learner has to encounter a word a specific number of times before learning it). Ellis (1997 in Ellis R. 1999: 47) refers to Andersen's 'power law of practice' according to which the amount of improvement decreases as a function of increasing frequency; in addition, there are also studies that show that a little can be learnt from just one or two exposures. Of course, it depends on the depth of the knowledge: it is possible that a single exposure is sufficient for some learning; on the other hand if by "knowing a word" we intend knowing the exact meaning, then researchers show that 6 or 7 exposures seem to be the minimum necessary, although it may vary.

### 2.3.2 Interaction

One basic factor that is necessary for second language learner development is conversation. Research has shown that what happens during a conversation, even banal, is more than just practice: it is an opportunity to learn and to correct mistakes. This is known also as the Interaction Hypothesis (Gass and Glew, 2011: 282) and it has to be understood through the explanation of the term 'negotiation for meaning': i.e. those instances in conversation when participants interrupt the flow of the conversation in order to understand a statement or a word unclear, or sometimes the entire sense of the statement. I would like to report an example<sup>23</sup> in order to clarify this topic: in this case, negotiation occurs because of a pronunciation problem:

Negotiation exchange (Ns= Native speaker, Nns= non native speaker)

**Nns:** And they have the chwach there.

**Ns:** The what?

**Nns:** The chwach- I know someone that-

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<sup>23</sup> This example comes from Pica (1987 in Gass and Glew 2011: 282)

**Ns:** what does it mean?

**Nns:** Like..um..American people they always go there every Sunday

**Ns:** Yes?

**Nns:** You kn- every morning that there pr- that American people get dressed up to got to um chwach.

**Ns:** Oh to church- I see.

As we can notice, negotiation is very important for it allows learner to understand the conversation and hence the input; furthermore, negotiation is really useful in the sense that it helps learners to focus their attention on problem areas, in this example pronunciation. Negotiation is also helpful because native speakers can provide a list of questions in order to help the learner and to make it easier for him to respond appropriately.

Gass and Glew (2011: 283) reflect on two important concepts of negotiation: negative feedback and attention. Negative feedback concerns information provided to a learner that there is a problem with something said, but it does not provide information about the nature of errors, nor it says how to fix that problem.

Gass and Glew continue their reflection considering negotiation and feedback important in order to focus learner's attention on just those areas of language that do not match those of the language being learned. It is a sort of selective attention: it is the centre of the Interaction Hypothesis and a crucial part of learning. Second language learner researchers agree that learners are exposed the more input than they can cope with, for this reason, a mechanism is necessary in order to help them isolate parts of these inputs as learners create and test hypotheses. This can be obtained by focusing one's attention on a limited and hence controlled amount of data at a given point in time. The authors (2011: 284) add that it is through interaction that a learner's attention is focused on a specific part of the language, and, in particular, on mismatches between target language forms and learner-language forms; obviously a necessary prerequisite is that learners are capable of noticing mismatches, as Schmidt and Frota (1986 in 2011: 285) showed in their study.

Gass and Glew (2011: 285) conclude claiming that, although the importance of attention is widely diffused, there is controversy whether attention has capacity limits. In particular, the interference model agree with the notion of a non-capacity limited model:

“Increasing the number of stimuli and response alternatives or the similarity between them will sometimes lead to confusion, reducing performance efficiency. This can be caused by a competition for the same types of codes during information flow, or cross-talk between similar codes”<sup>24</sup>

Others researchers (Anderson, 1983; Kahneman, 1973; Khilstrom, 1987; in 2011: 285) agree on the fact that the human brain is provided with a single equipped attentional processing system that allows, for a certain amount of input, to be attended to at one time. Furthermore, Gass and Glew say (2011: 285) that the fact that learners are exposed to input is explained in terms of cognitive overload: in this sense, learners have a mechanism that allows them to filter out some language stimuli from input, resulting in input ready for a further process. What remains isolated depends on the learners’ stage of development and their aptitude to learn.

### 2.3.3. Output

As we have already seen, the language acquisition process needs a starting point, triggered by input, and an ending point, that results in output.

Geiger-Jaillet (2005:13) explains output as a verbal reaction following a verbal communication (input). He says (2005:13): “ *Une entrée (input) de bonne qualité avec un minimum régulier d’exposition [...] sera aussi requise [...], avant de pouvoir espérer une quelconque sortie (output)*”<sup>25</sup> According to Geiger-Jaillet, if input is qualitative and effective, there will always be some results, even if he does not clarify whether these results are as qualitative and effective as the initial input.

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<sup>24</sup> Robinson, 2003 in Gass and Glew 2011: 285

<sup>25</sup> “A good quality input with a minimum amount of frequency of exposition [...] may result in any type of output.”



On the other hand, Gass and Glew (2011:285) consider the role of output in terms of production and language use. Indeed, output results in oral production, and during this process, learners have to make (consciously or unconsciously) certain decisions concerning the order of words and features of syntax, e.g. a second language learner who knows the meaning of what he needs to express, has to decide how to structure the sentence necessary to communicate his/her thought in the second language. For this reason, production is a very important feature because, according to Swain (1985 in Gass and Glew 2011:285), it may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing. He further claims (1995 in Gass and Glew 2011:285) that output may stimulate learners in moving from a semantic processing to a complete grammatical processing that is necessary for a good production; furthermore, output seems to play a fundamental role in the development of syntax and morphology.

Gass and Glew (2011:286) state that language learning occurs through production, in particular through four possible ways:

- Testing hypotheses about structures and meanings of a target language: through negotiation and feedback learners can be aware of erroneous hypotheses; in fact, the activity of using language helps to create a sort of analyticity that allows learners to think about language.
- Receiving crucial feedback for verification of these hypotheses: feedback, in fact, provides information about a potential problem, and it usually results in negotiation by providing learners with information about incorrect forms.
- Developing fluency and automaticity of processing.
- Understanding the differences between meaning-based and grammatically based use of language.

Gass and Glew (2011: 287) quote Gass and Selinker's reflection (2001: 290) according to which: output provides learners the opportunity to produce language and gain feedback that allows learners to notice mismatches between

their speech and those of their interlocutor or a deficiency in their output: noting that leads to reassessment that complete the process of language learning.

In conclusion, output is the response the second language learner gives to input and through them, it can be understood if language learning process met with success or not.

## 2. 4 Socio-psychological and individual factors: identity, aptitude and affectivity.

In previous sections, some factors have been analysed, in particular those that influence language learning, such as age of learners, the influence of the first language, input that triggers second language production. In addition; there are also factors that may vary from learner to learner and play an important role in language production. As Gass and Glew (2011: 287-288) point out, these individual factors are both negative and positive: the former, that could have a potential impact on language learning, are factors such as anxiety and introversion; the latter are factors such as extroversion, empathy, memory, inhibition, self-esteem, motivation, identity, aptitude and affectivity. Schumann (1978b in 1989: 234) proposed a typology of 49 factors affecting L2 acquisition, distinguishing between social, affective, personality, cognitive, biological, personal, aptitude and instructional factors. In this section, we will explore deeper just few of these factors; those that, according to the majority of the researchers, are the most influential. The first to analyse some of these aspects were Lambert and Gardner (1959 in Hamers and Blanc1989: 235), who stated that learners' motivation to learn a L2 is influenced by their attitudes towards the target group and by their orientation towards the learning tasks itself. According to Butler and Hakuta (2004: 132) socio-psychological factors, such as identity and attitude, are very influential in SLA. In fact, second language acquisition process is rooted in societies and cultures and it can be considered an acculturation process. Schumann's theory of acculturation model (1978c in Hamers and Blanc 1989: 235) state that all factors mentioned determine the degree of social and psychological distance between

learners and the target language, in other words, in the case of maximum social distance, the learner will receive minimal L2 input, instead, in the case of maximum psychological distance they will fail to exploit whatever input is available. On the other hand, the acculturation process concerns also the fact that through multiple cultural and ethnic groups and values, bilinguals can develop unique cultural and ethnolinguistic identities, separate from those monolinguals (Butler and Hakuta 2004: 132)

Lambert (1974 in 2004:132), conceptualized socio-psychological variables that affect second language acquisition: in his model, learner's attitude and motivations, along with aptitude, influence the degree of language attainment. In fact, bilingualism can develop if the learning environment values both the learners L1 and L2 and allows them to develop a positive identity. If the society does not value the learner L1 the result would be a subtractive bilingualism (as Schumann stated in his acculturation model, mentioned above). Several models have been proposed about influential variables that affect L2 learning: for example Gardner's Socio-educational model, Clement's Socio-contextual model and Noels, Clément and Pelletier's Self determination Model. Butler and Hakuta (2004: 132) sustain that positive attitudes are generally found to be related to higher degree of L2 performances, but except for this general finding, the results of these studies are mixed because of a numbers of factors such as: inconsistent definitions and conceptualization of attitudes and motivation; and variations in the contexts where these studies have been conducted. Indeed, the notion of attitude varies from model to model. Gardener (1985 in 2004:133) makes a distinction between motivation and attitude, where motivation is divided into instrumental and integrative. As Hakuta and Butler (2004: 133) state:

“Instrumental motivation is based on functional goals, such as getting a good job by learning L2, whereas integrative motivation is based on a desire to integrate into the target language group and culture”.

However, this distinction is not particularly clear: despite Lambert and Gardener's (1972 in 1989: 237) claim that in settings where there is a necessity of mastering a

second language, the instrumental approach is the most effective; nowadays, there is a strong debate over which types of motivations are related to L2 performance. The result is that L2 performance, actually, is greatly affected by contextual variations where learning takes place.

In the following years, Lambert and Gardner's motivation approach has been criticised: the main limit of this research is its limited ability to explain the causal relationship among variables. Maybe, as McLaughlin (1987 in 2004: 133) suggests, the relationship between attitude and L2 performance is bi-directional: those who have positive attitudes may attain higher achievement, and higher achievement also contributes to a more positive attitude. At any rate, a later research shows the relevance of other affective factors. Gardner and Smythe (1975 in 1989: 238), for example, found in their study on Anglo-Canadian learners of French L2 that motivation is also associated with more general predisposition such as ethnocentrism and authoritarianism, and with L2 course specific variables, such as attitude towards the teacher and anxiety over the course. This observation, along with other further studies, has been the basis of the socio-educational model proposed by Gardner (1985) where social context of learning partly determines the affective dimension of L2 learning, and variables as anxiety, attitudes and motivation form a complex pattern of interaction that influence the motivation mechanism.

Recently, as Butler and Hakuta (2004:133) report, other models have been proposed based on factors such as classroom perspectives (Dörnyei, 1994; Williams and Burden 1997 in Butler and Hakuta 2004:133) obtained through behavioural observations in the classroom. At any rate, even researchers carefully focused on this field of research, the effect of socio-psychological factors on L2 performance and its mechanism have not been fully understood; however, the result of all these studies seems to convert into the general assertion that outcomes largely depend on the socio-cultural context where learning takes place.

## 2.5 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, the main issue was whether or not second language acquisition and bilingualism indicate the same concept. Through the analysis of theoretical models and psychological process, we have tried to understand a little of what researchers and linguists mean when talking about second language acquisition. However; even in this field, much has still to be understood, for this reason, we should suggest that second language acquisition is a process that, in some way, makes part of the bilingual process, as to have some points in common and some other points that are divergent.

In the next chapter, the bilingual education perspectives that may be offered to a child, or a person rose in a bilingual/multilingual way will be analysed.

### **III. BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

In many communities all around the world, the acquisition of competence in two or more languages has a considerable significance from a personal, socio-cultural, economic and political point of view. According to Genesee (2004: 547 in Bhatia and Ritchie 2004), in some cases, the issues surrounding bilingualism can be seen as a problem to be overcome, and, for others, they are considered as challenges that, once mastered, benefit the individual and also the community. There is now a need in learning languages that, compared to the past, has changed because of new incentives such as the growing globalisation of business and commerce; a state of the art electronic communication that has created a need in multiple languages proficiency; the voluntary migration of people from country to country; and the fact that we are moving into a socio-political era when domination by majority languages on minority languages is becoming more difficult because of the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages in a number of regions in the world.

These are only few of the significant factors that push a family to reason in term of a bilingual education for their children.

#### 3.1 What is a bilingual education?

The bilingual education of a child in a monolingual country needs the continuous and uninterrupted efforts of parents, not only in the early years but also in a long-range period. In a bilingual context (for example, parents speaking two different languages at home or immigrants in a foreign country) the choice of education may be planned long before the birth of the child, in order to:

- choose the language that will be spoken to the child at the moment of his birth;
- choose the language of the school,
- in some cases, choose the country where the family will live.

According to Abdelilah- Bauer (2008: 123) these choices, that often are not conscious decisions, are usually made before the birth, in order to avoid future conflicts and to find equilibrium in the management of the family languages. However, solutions concerning a bilingual education can be found both inside the family, and outside, especially in those cases where a monolingual family decides to (or is forced to) raise its children bilingually.

In past years, several linguists and researchers attempted to define what a bilingual education is, and to find the kind of factors implicated in this type of education.

According to Hamers and Blanc (1989: 189), bilingual education is used to describe a variety of educational programs involving two or more languages to varying degrees. This definition implies the use of two languages as media of instruction; however, it does not include curricula in which a second or foreign language is taught as a subject, with no other use in academic activities, although L2 teaching may be part of a bilingual education program.

Considering this definition, we will see that bilingual education is divided into three categories and most of the educational programs fit into one of these:

- Instruction is given in both languages simultaneously;
- Instruction is given first in the L1 and the pupil is taught until such time when he is able to use the L2 as a means of learning;

- The largest part of instruction is given through the L2, and the L1 is introduced at a later stage, first as a subject and later as a medium of instruction.

Another definition of bilingual education is provided by Genesee (2004: 548) and it takes into consideration three features: linguistic goals, pedagogical approaches and level of schooling. He states (2004:548) that bilingual education is defined as education that aims to promote bilingual (or multilingual) competence by using both (or all) languages as media of instruction for a significant portion of the academic curriculum.

Before going ahead with the exploration of bilingual education opportunities, it must be pointed out that in literature, generally, researchers and linguists distinguish between two types of bilingual education: for children of the dominant group, and for those belonging to ethnic minority groups. In this dissertation this distinction will not be taken into consideration because it is beyond the purpose of my study, which aims to give a general knowledge and a general exploration of the bilingual education system.

In this chapter will discuss how school plays a fundamental role in the bilingual education because it is the main vehicle for the transmission of a language, which in case of bilingualism, could be different from the family language or the language of the country. It will explore in depth the opportunities and the possibilities offered to those families who want to raise their children bilingually.

### 3.2 The multilingual international schools

Multilingual international schools are found in various parts of the world and, according to Baker (1995: 150) there are more than 850 international schools in more than 80 countries. Carder (2007: 1) states that these schools have been created primarily to serve the educational necessities of children, whose parents work outside



their country of origin. They developed from the initiative of some international-minded groups of individuals seeking to provide education that might promote peace and international understanding.

Furthermore, these schools have been conceived in order to provide a continuous education system to those children forced to move around the world almost every year because of their parents' job; indeed, in almost all the schools the vehicular language is English. On this point, Baker (1995: 150) adds that such schools become bilingual when a local or another international language is incorporated in the curriculum. Hamers and Blanc (1989: 197) add that international schools have slightly different approaches and combine two, three or four languages to a different extent. They also report the example of the International School in Brussels which has been primarily created for children of European civil servants from different EEC countries; this school is divided into different linguistic groups and, in their first year, children start their elementary education in their mother tongue, if it is one of the four languages of the EEC: English, French, German and Italian; otherwise, if their mother tongue is not one of these four languages, they have to choose one of these linguistic groups. Then, in the second year an L2 is introduced which is either French, English or German; at a later stage, these four working languages will be used interchangeably. At any rate, this is just one example of the International School; it must be pointed out that not all the International Schools follow this organisation but, generally, each school tends to reflect the model of education of their original country: for example, in the case of an American international school, teachers usually come from America and follow an American educational program. Baker (1995: 151) provides the example of the John F. Kennedy School in Berlin, with 1280 students from 5 to 19 years old, coming from 23 nationalities. Here, 50% of teachers are American and 50% are German. The school is bilingual, bi-national and bicultural in German and English, and instruction is conducted in both languages continuously.

### 3.3 Immersion programs

Immersion bilingual programs started developing in Canada, in the sixties, as a sort of educational experiment in St. Lambert, Montreal, where some English-speaking middle class parents convinced the school district administration to set up a class of 26 children in order to let them become competent speakers, readers and writers in French, and reach normal achievement levels also in their mother tongue. (Baker 1995: 160). As Hamers and Blanc (1989: 198) state, “immersion” means that a group of L1 speaking children receive all, or part of their education, through a L2 as a medium of instruction. The immersion approach is based on two pillars: the L2 is learned similarly to the L1; a language is best learned in a stimulating context that enhances the language functions and exposes the child to the natural forms of the language. Baker (1995: 161), on the other hand, suggests that immersion education is defined according to two main features:

- age at which a child starts the educational experience. This may be at the kindergarten or infant stage (early immersion); at nine to ten years old (delayed or middle immersion), or at secondary level (late immersion);
- the amount of time spent in immersion in a day. There is the distinction between: total immersion (usually children start with 100% immersion in the second language, after two or three years it is reduced to 80% for the next three or four years, finishing junior schooling with 50% immersion) and partial immersion that provides close to 50% immersion in the second language throughout infant and junior instruction.

An example of immersion programs is the English International School of Padua that will be treated in depth in the fourth chapter.

#### 3.3.1 Early Total Immersion

This program is the most popular in the scenario of immersion education. This is the type of approach that, initially, was set up in St. Lambert; for this reason, Hamers and Blanc (1989:199) define it as a sort of prototype for all early immersion programs. It has been noticed that at an initial stage (for the first four years of early total immersion), children tend not to progress in English as do monolingual English children in traditional classes. Baker (1995: 162) asserts that reading, spelling, and punctuation are not so developed. However; this initial pattern does not last, in fact, after six years of schooling (more or less), early total immersion children have caught up with their monolingual peers in English language skills. Moreover; at the end of the elementary instruction, the total immersion experience has generally not affected first language speaking, rather, children are perfectly proficient in reading, writing, speaking and understanding French in a far superior way than their English companions that learned French as second language. In addition, at around eleven years old, most students in early total immersion programs approach native-like performance in French.

### 3.3.2 Early Partial Immersion

Early partial immersion programs differ from the total immersion programs in that both languages are used as means of instruction from the onset of schooling, and the relative use of both languages varies from program to program (Hamers and Blanc, 1989: 199). Baker (1995: 162) analysed that, in this program, children tend to lag behind for three or four years in their English language skills, differently from total early immersion children whose performance is surprising. At the end of the elementary schooling, partial early immersion children reach mainstream peers in English language attainment; however, unlike early total children, the partial early immersion children do not tend to overtake mainstream comparison groups in English level achievement.

Subsequently, Baker (1995: 162) adds that a distinction, between these two types of immersion, is also found in the level of proficiency of the other subjects, such as Mathematics, Science, History and Geography. In fact, while in early total immersion, children perform as well in these subjects as do mainstream children; in early partial immersion, children tend to lag behind comparable mainstream children (at least initially). Baker (1995: 163) claims that, probably, this is due to the fact that these children's French abilities are insufficiently developed in order to think mathematically or scientifically in their second language.

### 3.3.3 Late Immersion

Late immersion programs have been conceived for high-school students, as Hamers and Blanc (1989: 199) sustain. They also add that these programs aim to develop French language skills in students who have already had a traditional L2 instruction. The goal of the program is to allow students to reach a functional bilinguality by the time they finish high school. In general, during the first year, 85% of schooling is in French, while the remaining 15% English (we are still talking about English native speakers in Canada) is taught as a first language; during the following years the students can choose to attend only 40% of the classes in French. Concerning the other subjects, Baker (1995: 163) asserts that for late immersion programs the results are similar to the early partial programs.

The results of the St. Lambert experience suggest that a bilingual education obtained through immersion programs, in particular early total immersion schooling, do not have negative effects on curriculum performance. Indeed, most children gain a second language without cost to their performance in the scholastic curriculum.

### 3.3.4. Success and critique of immersion programs

Since the St. Lambert “experiment”, immersion programs have spread rapidly in America, Europe and Asia. In particular, focusing on the Canadian experience, which was a pioneer in this typology of education, Baker (1995: 164) reports that this expansion is due to several factors such as: the fact that immersion in Canada aims to bilingualism in two prestigious, majority languages (English and French) and this relates automatically to an additive bilingualism; immersion bilingual education is not compulsory: parents, in fact, can liberally decide to send their children to these schools, and the conviction to offer their children a better possibility plus the opportunity to learn two languages at the same time, has enhanced the value of these schools; immersion teachers are competent bilinguals; children start immersion education with a similar lack of experience of the second language because most of them are monolingual. This last point is particularly important not only because it simplifies the teachers’ tasks, but it also means that children’s self-esteem and classroom motivation is not at risk due to some children being linguistically more expert.

However, not all the researchers agree with the fact that immersion programs may have positive impacts on children. Hamers and Blanc (1989: 201), report a number of criticisms to the immersion programs from different points of view: experimental, linguistic, pedagogical and social. They continue stating that from an experimental perspective, it has often been pointed out that the immersion groups were not comparable to controls, because immersion was favoured by parents; or that the result may be attributed to a “Hawthorne effect”<sup>26</sup>. Another controversial point

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26 Firstly described in the 1950’s by H.A. Landersberg, this term refers to the tendency of some people to work harder and perform better when they are participants in an experiment. Individuals may change their behaviour due to the attention they are receiving from researchers rather than because of any manipulation of independent variables. (Cherry, K., 2013, What is the Hawthorne Effect?, available at: [http://psychology.about.com/od/hindex/g/def\\_hawthorn.htm](http://psychology.about.com/od/hindex/g/def_hawthorn.htm) last visited 06/03/15)

concerns the fact that this program may not be indicated for all types of children. Hamers and Blanc (1989: 201) report that it has been argued that immersion programs favour gifted children; Genesee (1976 in Hamers and Blanc 1989:201), instead, claims that these programs are suitable for all children; in particular, below-average children in early immersion develop the same proficiency in communicative skills in the L2 as above-average children. Later, Bruck (1982 in Hamers and Blanc 1989:201) claims that children with learning difficulties and slow learners benefit from an immersion program to the extent that they do not lag behind other children with learning difficulties; Trites (1981 in Hamers and Blanc 1989: 201), on the other hand, after a follow-up study, suggests that children with learning difficulties should not be included in immersion programs. Recently, through the article “Is immersion education appropriate for all students?”, Gaffney<sup>27</sup> (1999) deals with the question whether immersion programs are suitable for this or that particular student. Talking about her experience at the Forest Glen International School, she claims that: “...it was never thought that the English Program wasn’t inappropriate for a student, even when she/he was struggling”. The fact that immersion programs are not for everyone, leads to the “danger that immersion programs could become elitist” (Genesee 1992 in Gaffney 1999), as she says to support her article. Quoting Holobow (1988), Gaffney shows the numerous advantages that an immersion program leads to, comparing immersion students with their English-only peers: “...general language skills are enhanced, general cognitive development and academic achievement are enriched, and appreciation of the culture and the people represented by the target language is strengthened and broadened”. However, she also claims that there are students, who would be defined as “at-risk” according to these characteristics: 1) below average general ability, 2) poor first language ability, 3) low socio-economic status, and 4) ethnic minority group status. (Genesee 1992 in Gaffney 1999). Despite

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27 Gaffney K., S. is a 4th grade teacher at the Forest Glen International, Indianapolis.

these impairments, Gaffney reports that concerning below average general ability, students performance on target language tests showed that they scored lower on literacy based language skills than students with average or above average general ability, and on interpersonal ability they scored the same as average or above their counterparts. However, the results were unexpected, when below average students were tested in comparison with their non-immersion peers. In fact, the immersion students scored more or less the same than their English-only peers.

Gaffney adds also that, regarding those students with poor first language ability, the deficiencies that cause difficulties in their native mother tongue, carry over into the second language; that is, these students would experience difficulties independently of the kind of program they follow (immersion or monolingual).

As to socio-economic status, she claims that both the immersion and non-immersion groups scored similarly on English language, Math, and Science tests. However, while the results were given in English, the instructions were given to the immersion students in the target language (reinforcing the importance of transfer of knowledge cross-linguistically). Concerning, instead, ethnic minority groups, these students will experience the same entry level difficulty in immersion, as they would in non-immersion classrooms. Gaffney states also that the placement of at-risk students in immersion programs might be seen as beneficial, since it may be the students' only chance at second language acquisition, but also the same teaching method could provide some benefits, in particular because immersion teachers use particular methods to communicate new concepts in the target language such as: audio, visual and kinaesthetic methods to deliver the same information. To conclude, Gaffney asserts that immersion programs are not only suitable for all students, but also they provide benefits to students with particular conditions. She reports only one case where immersion may not be appropriate: the case of developmentally immature students. In that particular case, cognitively and linguistically immature students will experience academic problems in either language; therefore, it is to the student's benefit to be pulled out of an immersion program.

### 3.4 Heritage Schools and heritage bilingual education

Heritage schools are those schools where heritage language bilingual education is adopted, in order to allow language minority children to use their native, ethnic, home or heritage language in the school as a medium of instruction and the goal is reaching a full bilingualism. Some heritage language educational programs are, for example, those that use minority languages as medium of instruction such as Navajo and Spanish in the US, Catalan in Spain, Breton in France, and so on. According to Baker (1995: 153) the child's native language is protected and developed alongside the development of the majority language. He brings the example of Ireland where an Irish and English education is available for those children with Irish backgrounds. In this way, the aim is to protect the indigenous Irish language in schools from the pervading growth of English. At any rate, heritage schools can be found all over the world even under different terms, especially in the US where there are "ethnic, community and mother tongue schools". Furthermore, in the US there are also public heritage language schools that are called "Maintenance Bilingual education" or "Developmental Maintenance Bilingual Education" but there are few of these schools. Even if public and private heritage schools can be called in different ways, the main purpose is always the same. In fact, according to Baker (1995: 153) heritage or maintenance language education aims to educate language minority children through their minority language in a majority language society. However, in most countries, the majority language will also be taught in the curriculum, ranging from second language lessons to varying proportion of the curriculum taught through the majority language. Furthermore, Baker (1995: 154) suggests that the term "heritage" may not be particularly appropriate because there is the danger that it indicates the past and not the future, that it points to the tradition rather than the contemporary; indeed, partly



for this reason these languages are also called “community languages”. At any rates, heritage schools are characterised by features such as: classrooms that contain a varying mixture of language majority and language minority children, the language minority’s pupil’s home language will often be used approximately half of curriculum time and the use of the minority language as medium of knowledge is justified by the fact that usually, children easily transfer ideas, concepts, skills and knowledge into the majority language: however, this happens only when both languages are sufficiently developed to cope with concepts, content and curriculum materials.

### 3.5 Dual Language Schools

In dual language schools there is a balanced presence of majority language and minority language children. According to Baker (1995: 145) the approximately equal use of two languages in the curriculum allows children to become equally bilingual and biliterate. These schools are quite popular in the US where there are, in particular, several elementary schools. Here, there are bilingual teachers who aim to keep the two languages separate in the classroom; furthermore, in dual language classrooms a language balance of children close to 50%-50% is attempted. Baker adds that if one language becomes dominant the purpose of the school may be at risk, in fact, an imbalance in the two languages among students may result in one language used to the exclusion of the other. In this way, one language group may become excluded entailing segregation rather than integration, which is far behind the purpose of bilingualism. Bilingualism indeed does not involve only linguistic goals, but also socio-cultural factors such as cultural belonging and integration that Dual Schools aim to preserve. Baker (1995: 146) reports the basic steps of a dual school development that often starts with the creation of a dual language kindergarten class, and as students move through the grades a new dual language

class is created every year. In fact, there are not only elementary dual language schools, but there is also a secondary dual language education that assumes different names in many other countries of the world.

Apart from producing bilingual and biliterate children, Baker adds that the aim of a Dual Language school is also to gain status and to flourish, and to obtain these goals, this school provides standardized tests to compare with other schools in the locality in order to strive to show relative success. Furthermore, this type of school provides an equal education to those children having a different language background, and also to educate bilingual, biliterate and multicultural children. As Baker (1995:147) asserts, these schools permit both minority language students to acquire an accurate knowledge of the literature both of their native language and of the majority language, and majority students to become familiar with a second language. For this reason the Dual language schools adopt practices like: two languages and having an equal status as medium of instruction through teaching subjects in both languages. Furthermore, other important features of a Dual language school are: bilingual school ethos obtained by the creation of an equal and transparent bilingual environment through notice boards, curriculum resources, cultural events written and organised in both languages, and lunch-time where children can use the language they prefer. Moreover, the adoption of qualified bilingual staff is another strategy of Dual Language policy. According to Baker (1995: 148) the teachers use both languages on different occasions with their students; however, if this is not possible, teachers may be paired and work together. Everyone working in such a bilingual environment may also be bilingual in order to promote that kind of education. In these schools a central idea concerns the language separation and compartmentalization: during the lessons, one language is used at a time. There are strategies such as the alternate days system: that is using one language one day, and the day after another language; or also different languages may be used for different lessons. The most important thing is to organise the distribution of time in order to achieve bilingual and biliterate students, and every school decides the amount of time spent learning through each language.

At any rate, Baker (1995: 149) highlights that the instruction in Dual Language schools will keep boundaries between languages: in that way the language minority students will help language majority students and vice versa; inter-dependence, indeed, may stimulate cooperation and friendship, as well as learning and achievement.

However, children will sometimes switch between a language and another (in private conversations, or during teachers' explanations) and this is a natural step, because, especially in young children, the use of languages is not often consciously controlled. For this reason, Baker (1995: 149) claims that there is an existing paradox in Dual Language Schools: boundaries are only kept between languages so that separation does not occur between children, who are integrated in all lessons thanks to this language segregation. Moreover, bilingual teachers assure that the children do not switch during the lessons; in fact, they are expected to use the same language of the teachers.

Despite the aims of forging bilingual and biliterate children, Baker (1995: 150), through the example of a dual language Spanish (minority) /English (majority), warns about the danger that such segregation, especially when obtained by using one language for some subjects (e.g. Spanish for Social Studies and History) and the other for other subjects (e.g. English for Maths and Science), may result in affecting the status of the languages in the eyes of children, parents and society. The majority language, then, will be associated with modern technology and science, while the minority language will be associated with tradition and culture.

### 3.6 Scholastic bilingual education overview

As we have seen, concerning a scholastic bilingual education, there are a lot of possibilities in the world for those families who want to rear their children bilingually. The bilingual schools described in the previous sections are the most

common institutions. As Grosjean (2012) reports, only in the U.S., according to a 2007 statistical survey, more than 55 million inhabitants are bilingual, that is 18% of the population, and this number is increasing. For this reason, there is an important demand for bilingual schools.

In particular, Professor Padilla, who conducted a research on bilingual schools in California, claims (1977:55) that there the main rationale used by parents rests entirely on what is best for the individual child, and this is also the main concern of these bilingual schools. As Padilla states (1977: 67), although this kind of education has been criticised during the past years as the responsible for encouraging ethnic segregation and separation (which, actually, is far from the purpose of a bilingual school), it can provide one of the best alternative means to diminish such separation through the promise of providing an equal educational opportunity to those minority language children, and it also provides the opportunity for all students to learn about and experience the benefits of a plurilinguistic society.

### 3.7 Education at home

The sections above have described the main opportunities offered by the school system to educate a child bilingually. Along with this system there is also the parallel choice made by those families who decide to raise their child bilingually, teaching a second language at home. This could be seen as a harder challenge than that of designating the bilingual education to the school, because it requires a constant effort both from the parents and from the child. In this dissertation the main parental strategies of home education will be discussed: the first is the One Parent One Language (OPOL) method and the second is the “Minority Language at home”.

### 3.7.1 The OPOL option

This is the most frequent and common method used in raising children bilingually. According to Döpke (1993: 12) there are different family patterns in which this strategy could take place:

1) The parents have different mother tongues, and the language of the country is the language of one parent. Furthermore each parent speaks his/her language to the child.

a: The parents speak the language of the wider community to one another.

b: The parents speak a minority language to one another.

c: Each parent speaks the language they speak with the child when addressing each other.

2) The parents have different mother tongues, neither of which is spoken by the broader community. Each parent speaks his/her language to the child.

a: The parents speak the language of the broader community to one another.

b: The parents speak a minority language to one another.

c: Each parent speaks the language they speak with the child when addressing each other.

3) Both parents are native speakers of the language spoken by the broader community. One parent chooses to speak one language other than his/her native language to the child.

a: The parents speak the language of the broader community to one another.

b: The parents speak the minority language to one another.

c: Each parent speaks the language they speak with the child when addressing each other.

4) Both parents are native speakers of the same minority language (typical situation of immigrant families). One of the parents chooses to speak the language of the broader community to the child.

a: The parents speak the language of the broader community to one another.

b: The parents speak the minority language to one another.

c: Each parent speaks the language they speak with the child when addressing each other.

Döpke (1993: 13) suggests that in all these four cases, the ‘b’ alternatives guarantee a more extensive and a more diversified exposure to the minority language than the ‘a’ alternatives. However, in the majority of families the ‘a’ alternative is often a necessity, and the ‘c’ is rarely chosen. Furthermore, the third pattern, which may appear a bit unusual, could be also used in order to achieve productive bilingualism (Saunders 1982b in Döpke 1993). This will be also the type of approach analysed in the fifth chapter, transposed into the Italian scenario.

At any rate, pattern 3 is not so different from pattern 4 where immigrant families may choose to undertake a simultaneous rather than a consecutive bilingualism with their children.

As Döpke (1992: 13) claims, the OPOL strategy is not only an intellectual challenge to the child, but it presents also a fulfilment for the parents’ needs to interact with their children naturally in the same language they grew up in, to maintain and develop a much loved language and to practice the language of their own country:

“Hi! I’m Danish with a British OH. We were living in the UK, and I had a pretty straightforward set up for teaching my now 2-year-old daughter both languages, dictated by the fact that I was the only one around who spoke Danish:) So our arrangement was that I spoke Danish all the time with her, and dad spoke English. Now we have moved to Denmark, and I have drifted into speaking English with her, it is what we speak at home/my OH and I speak to each other. She goes to nursery where they speak Danish, and rest of the family/grandparents etc speak Danish to her here, so she is exposed to Danish daily. Is that a reasonable arrangement? Should I stick with that, or should I go back to speaking Danish to her myself as was the original set up? She has mostly English words now, with some Danish too...”<sup>28</sup>

There are a lot of families that have adopted this strategy, however, as Döpke (1993: 13-19) claims it must be said that this method could not only result in productive

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<sup>28</sup> Extracts of conversation based on a discussion on the Facebook group: Raising bilingual/Multilingual children

bilingual children; in some cases, in fact, it results in receptive bilinguals. She says that, sometimes, in some people's experience in raising their child according to the OPOL method, the minority language is met with considerable resistance by the child (as shown by the example on page 73). In other cases, the contrary occurs:

“Has anyone here had the experience that his/her child resists learning the local language? My child's English seems to be fine (of course, since I am American), although somewhat delayed, but her German is way way behind. In fact, she prefers to answer German (which she understands only sometimes) questions in English, unless they come from her German father. My child is 5 and in a German kindergarten, but she is also very much an introvert if the number of kids in a group is too large.”

“My daughter is 4 1/2 and we speak only English at home, and she learnt German at kindergarten (she's been going since she was 2). She was fine with speaking German at first, but then for all of last year she refused to speak an German at kindergarten or with anyone apart from her sister. She was happy to speak German at home with her sister, sing songs, play games, etc. but would only speak to other people in English, or not speak to them at all. I spoke to an amazing speech therapist about it, and she told me how bilingual kids often have silent periods when they're learning a new language, where they're absorbing it and learning it, but won't speak it until they feel confident. I also think my daughter sometimes feels anxious at kindergarten, and can be quite shy as well. She started speaking a little bit of German at kindergarten earlier this year, and now she speaks it all the time and lots of it as well (so they tell me). So in our situation, we just had to be patient with her to feel confident in herself, and so far she seems happy to speak German again.”

Hence, even if the OPOL method is the most common and widespread between multilingual families, it does not guarantee success in becoming perfectly bilingual. There are in fact, some points that may concern parents such as confusion (that should not be confused with code-switching), lack in cohesion and consistency, language delay or lack in language minority speakers. At any rate, there are a lot of positive statements by parents experiencing this method with their children:

“Hello and good morning. My son was exposed to Polish through his 'granny' a lady who has lived in Edinburgh since the war and who looked after him for 5 years. He is now 23 and after initial antipathy towards Polish pronunciation between the ages of 5-12 yrs he now speaks with relative confidence and sometimes corrects his father (not a native speaker). He is the only of of his cousins born abroad who does speak Polish, and feels good translating for them when they visit Poland, which is often. The other cousins (all now in their 20s) look at my sisters and say - why did you not teach us Polish when we were small?  
So, keep speaking to your children in your Mother Tongue. They will smile at you when they are older and say thank you in your language”

“My son (3 3/4) just had a break through in his minority language German. He now forms proper sentences (with some English mixed in) and uses mostly the right grammar. It's my native language and just half a year ago I was so upset because he was chatting away with his dad in English and hardly talking to me at all. I started cutting down the time in English daycare, convinced the bilingual Daddy to start speaking German with his son and I make an extra effort to spend lots quality time with our kid. I am not proud to admit I/we also reverted to bribery the last couple of days to get our son to finally start speaking German with his dad. We have a big bag of plastic sea creatures and he gets one every time we feel he made a good effort. He's so excited every time he gets one and talks about speaking deutsch and getting gifts for it all day. It doesn't feel like the best approach, but it works and that's all I care about right now. Just wanted to share this with you, I'm so happy to hear him speak my native language!”

In the next chapters, there will be a deep analysis of this method in particular, referring to the situation of Italian families who decided to raise their child bilingually.

### 3.7.2 The Minority Language at home option

Another strategy that may be adopted by families is the Minority Language at Home (often found with the acronym ML@H). This method is far less common than the previous one, but successful. It simply indicates that one language; in this case the minority language is spoken at home, even if this is not the native language of both parents. The reason for the success of this method lies on the consistent and continuing interaction from birth until the moment when the child will leave his/her home. According to Barron-Hauwaert (2004: 169) this method can be used temporarily as a way to establish one language in the early years or to maintain and protect a language when living in another country. She suggests that there are two types of ML@H families:

- 1) a mixed- language couple where each parent speaks a different language, however, one of them willingly decides to use his or her second language at home or with the family to support the other partner's minority language. One condition is the fluency in the language, in order not to transmit wrong input to the child, he/she, in fact, should be able to participate in every day conversations and help the child with his/her



homework. This method is useful to keep the minority language regularly used and it evolves with the family, in fact, according to Barron-Hauwaert, a parent that uses two languages is a great role-model to the child who is expected to do the same. She also reports (2004: 169) the example of a linguist who adopted this method in the past: in 1985, Alvino Fantini decided to use his wife's native tongue at home (Spanish), and the example of a case study of a German/English couple that started their life in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Six years later, when they moved to America, they found that German was fast declining, so the man decided to adopt German as main language to speak to his wife and child in order to prevent a possible decline.

- 2) a family with two monolingual parents, who live in a foreign country where they use a second language. Like the first typology of family, this family makes the choice to speak a minority language at home in order to counterbalance the effects of the community's majority-languages by using the minority-language at home. As Barron-Hauwaert suggests (2004: 170), probably one or both of the parents would use the majority language in the community, depending on their needs and abilities.

Furthermore, as long as the code-switching is linked to clear boundaries and the minority language is spoken at home, it should not stop the acquisition. Barron-Hauwaert provides again the example of the case study of a family with two German parents, but in this case, the father uses English with his daughter to help her acquire the language as early as possible.

After having analysed the main different types of bilingual education, both at school and at home, in the next chapters there will be the analysis of two methods that Italian monolingual families can use in order to raise their children bilingually: The English International School of Padua and the OPOL method, in particular

related to those Italian monolingual families who experience this kind of language education at home.



## **IV. THE ENGLISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF PADUA: FOCUS ON IMMERSION PROGRAM**

### 4.1 Introduction

When raising a child, a family decides which type of education best suits for his/her needs or motivations. Nowadays, there are some families that wish to give their children the opportunity to grow up through speaking two languages and this goal could be reached through different ways. One way is providing a bilingual education through school. Families do not need to be bilingual or second language speakers to provide this type of education because in bilingual school there are native speaker teachers, who provide children the necessary input to become bilingual.

This goal can be reached through different educational programs, as already seen in the previous chapter, but one in particular is the object of the analysis of this chapter: the immersion program at the English International School of Padua (EISP), a private school for children from 18 months up to 18 years of age and providing them a full education cycle from nursery to secondary school.

### 4.2 History of the school

According to the official website of the school, its history started thanks to Dr. Lucio Rossi, who, inspired by the idea that the acquisition of a language is more effective in the first few years of life and is facilitated by living in a natural and durable setting, decided to found The English International School, in 1987. The first class was composed of five students and the first school was based inside the building of an Italian Nursery School. Year after year, more students joined the school and this resulted in having an important number of students attending each year group within the primary school. Due to the lack of space in the first school, in

1989 the EISP moved to the building of the local parish church of Don Bosco. Later, in 1994 the Middle School was established, in 1995 the Nursery School was opened and then in the same year EISP transferred again near the Barbarigo School. In 1997, the EISP was finally settled in its current locations. Due to the increase in demand of registrations, in 2002 a second building was constructed near and linked to the first. In 2004 the EISP became recognized with a decree from MIUR as an IB World School. Then in 2006, a third building was constructed, a few meters away from the first two schools and this building is currently being used by the Middle and High Schools.<sup>29</sup> The school welcomes more than 800 students of different nationalities and 90 teaching staff.

#### 4.3. Organisation of the school

In immersion schools, as already mentioned, children (of different native languages) are educated through an L2 as a medium of instruction. At the English International School, the L2 used as medium of instruction is English and it is used in nearly all subjects as the principal communication channel, with the exception of the study of other languages, their culture and literature, including, obviously, Italian.

This school starts applying an early total immersion of the language, switching in the later years to a partial immersion: in Nursery and Reception, in fact, children are exposed to English 100% of the time; this percentage changes and decreases in the following years up to 80%. This choice enables students to acquire and develop their ability to master the cognitive understanding of a language that for many is not their mother tongue. Language acquisition is not an end in itself, as it is used to spark mental mechanisms that with the use of only one language could remain inactive, hence contributing to intellectual development.

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<sup>29</sup> Based on information on the official website of the school, available at: <http://www.eisp.it/index.php/it/>

According to the school website, as an immersion school, the EISP aims to offer students the best environment to develop and achieve their potential personalities, intellect, an open-minded mentality and the ability to reason and reflect.

This school, moreover, has the goal to prepare students for the challenges and the complexity of the world, and to reach this aim it seeks to:

- Provide them with a solid foundation in knowledge, competencies and critical thinking skills.
- Foster an understanding and respect for principles and moral values by appreciating the richness of the beliefs and cultures of others and encouraging respect for one's self and others, individual freedom and the common good.
- Stimulate curiosity, creativity and the use of the imagination.
- Cultivate motivation, independence and self-confidence.<sup>30</sup>

This type of organisation is a bit different both from the Italian educational system and the U.K. educational system. These differences will be discussed below.

#### 4.3.1 The Nursery School

This first step into bilingual education is, in turn, divided into two groups: nursery school and infant school. The former corresponds to the Italian “*Asilo Nido*” and to the English nursery, and welcomes 2 years old toddlers; while the latter corresponds to the Italian “*Scuola dell’infanzia*” and to the English pre-school (for 3 years old children) and reception (for 4 years old children).

This first step lasts three years and the main aims are to provide:

“...a developmentally appropriate and individualised learning environment that enables the children to enjoy their time at school whilst growing physically, emotionally, socially and cognitively.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Based on information on the official website of the school:

<http://www.eisp.it/index.php/en/about-eisp-2/mission-philosophy> (last visited 27/03/15)

<sup>31</sup> Official website of the English International School, available at: <http://www.eisp.it/index.php/en/learning-at-eisp-2/nursery-infant-school>

The children are followed in their every day tasks in order to help them to make appropriate choices, to grow and develop their mental capacity and above all they are introduced to the English language. According to the immersion program's status, English is used 100% during the daytime. In this way, the children receive continuous linguistic input that are fundamental for language acquisition.

The nursery and infant school are based on the British style curriculum that, in addition to the main areas of development (personal, social, emotional, communicative and physical) introduces also four educational areas:

- 3) Mathematical reasoning, problem solving and Numeracy,
- 4) Literacy,
- 5) Expressive arts and Creative design,
- 6) Knowledge and understanding of the world.

As reported on the official website of the school, the programs these children will be exposed to are conceived in order to motivate and challenge their young minds. Furthermore, play represents a pillar of this instruction, given that through play they are offered real life learning opportunities. Playing in English will be associated in their mind with pleasure; for this reason, learning a new language will be perceived as a game. Most parents choose to enrol their children at this stage, given that, children are not necessarily required to have any knowledge of English, which, instead, is fundamental if enrolment takes place during other steps of this bilingual school.

#### 4.3.2 Elementary School

After Nursery and Infant School, children apply for Elementary School. This stage of instruction corresponds to the Italian "*Scuola Elementare*" and to the English primary school from year 1 to 6. In this case the EISP's Elementary school has six year groups: Reception (corresponding to the last year of the Italian "*Asilo*", and to Year 1 of the English educational system) and Years 1 to 5.

This differentiation is, in turn, divided into two other groups: Key stage one, composed of children from Reception to Year 2, and Key stage two with all the other years.

Each year group has a program to follow, according to the English system. English is the vehicular language even if the native language of the child is also important; at any rate, children are expected to communicate in English in order to become more proficient and self-confident. The period of observation spent in November was with children of Elementary School, for this reason, this part will be explored in depth in the last part of the chapter.

#### 4.3.3. Middle School

Middle school at the EISP corresponds to the Italian “*Scuola Media*”, and to Years 7 to 9 of the English educational system. It has three year groups starting from Years 6 to 8. At this stage of instruction the admission policy is quite strict in order to welcome children that could feel confident not only with the environment but, above all, with the English level used at this point of their education. Those children who wish to enrol in the middle school need to provide the transcripts of record of their previous school along with a letter of presentation written by the Head Master of the previous school, and the child’s behaviour must be grade 8 or above. However, the most important requirements are those that concern their level of English. Children need to possess the KET certification if they enrol for Year 6 or 7; the PET certification for Year 8 and he/she must pass tests in Mathematics, Italian and English.

Children at Middle school acquire a good mastery of the English language in an educational environment consisting in a combination between the Italian program established by the Ministry of the Education and the main elements of the Key Stage three National Curriculum of England and Wales. In this way, they are educated in a



multicultural environment that allows them to grow up with an open-mindedness, unifying aspects of the Anglo-Saxon and Italian approaches.

Progressively, the amount of time of English spoken decreases: in fact; even if the language of instruction is in English, there are also subjects taught in Italian (Italian, Technical Design and Mathematics) and there is also the insertion of a second foreign language. The linguistic and literacy areas of the curriculum, instead, have been conceived in order to improve students' experience, understanding and skills in reading, listening, speaking and writing of both the English and the Italian language. Furthermore, children can also require the introduction of a third foreign language.

At the end of this educational stage, children are evaluated by an external Italian commission in order to receive an impartial evaluation on their scholastic knowledge that must be at the same level of the Italian Schools.

#### 4.3.4 The High School

The last stage of the bilingual education at the EISP corresponds to the High School, or the Italian "*Scuola Superiore*" and Years 10 to 13 of the English Educational System. Those who wish to enrol in the school at this stage, need to fulfil the same requirements of the Middle School, however, their linguistic level of English must be demonstrated by the possession of:

- a FIRST certificate<sup>32</sup> or an equivalent level of English,
- a Middle School Diploma ( the diploma released after Middle School, attesting that the child has attended Middle School) with a final evaluation of at least 7 or equivalent

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<sup>32</sup> The First Certificate, also known as FCE (First Certificate in English) is an upper-intermediate level certification issued by The Cambridge English Language Assessment that certifies that a person can use everyday written and spoken English for work or study purposes (Based on information on the official website of The Cambridge English Assessment available at: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/first/index.aspx>, last visited 20/04/15)

- grade “C” or above in IGCSE (International Grade Certificate of Secondary Education) exams in every subject that they wish to study during the two years of the IBDP

They also must pass admission tests in English, Italian and Mathematics.

The High School path is divided into two groups: during the first two years students follow the University of Cambridge International Examinations board IGCSE course; during the last two years the students follow the International Baccalaureate Diploma program (IBDP).

According to the official website of the school, the IGCSE course aims to develop students’ skills in creative thinking, enquiry and problem solving; furthermore, the IBDP leads to a qualification that is internationally recognised and accepted by the majority of Universities not only in Italy but also in the world.

At the end of this path students are perfectly bilingual, in the sense that they are able to switch between languages normally, understand every domain of conversation, sustain each type of conversation, read and write in a proficient and academic way.

#### 4.4. Observation on Elementary school.

I had the opportunity to stay for a short period (three weeks) in the Elementary School in order to observe the daily path to become bilingual. There, I had a different role depending on the class I was observing and the age of children: in some classes and for some subjects I simply observed the lessons and the children’s interaction between them and with the teacher; in other lessons I interacted with the class during song time and I followed a small group of children during their activities and exercises.

The classes I focused on during these three weeks were not all the classes, but only those classes that, according to the teachers, could be the most interesting for the research. In light of this, the classes I observed were: Reception, Year 1, Year 3 and year 5: through this order I could observe how the linguistic situation of each year

changes and improves, and above all, how mistakes and imperfections change and get solved.

#### 4.4.1 Week 1

During the first week I started my observation with the youngest children of the school: Reception, which welcomes children of 4-5 years old and Year 1 with children of 5-6 years old. In the school there were three reception classes: Reception A, B and C, and three classes in the Year 1: A, B and C. Each year follows a common program pre-established by the teachers, in order to guarantee a regular and common progress for each class.

##### 4.4.1.1 Reception

Reception consists in a preliminary class that welcomes children from the Nursery, before they go to the Year 1.

Given that the main interest of this research consists of the choice made by Italian parents in raising their children bilingually, one of the first things I observed in these classes concerns the percentage of Italian native speakers attending that particular class. In Reception A, 100% of children are Italian native speakers, while in B 84% and in C 61,5% are Italian native speakers, the rest of the children have parents of different nationalities or come from other countries. These percentages will be more or less the same also for the other Years of the Primary School. Among these Italian native speakers there are also different levels of the English language: some of them have been attending the English school since the Nursery so they are quite confident with English; others, instead, are less confident and need more help. There was also a child who had just arrived in Reception so he did not speak English at all; however, after two months of total immersion program he was starting understanding English and he was reactive to the language.

As already mentioned, at this point of immersion program education, activities are completely held in English in order to provide the most efficient input for children who already are 4 and 5 years old. The goal is for child to reach the same language level before starting Year 1.

Every morning, in each class there is a sort of ritual: the head count of the children who were sat on a carpet with different colours: each colour corresponds to a group of children who work together and will receive a recognition or a sticker at the end of the lesson, according to the progress made. Furthermore, after the headcount, the teacher illustrates the daily plan, which is repeated by children. This is useful in order to create an automatic association between the language and that particular activity. During this week, the activities done were English (Reception A and C) and Maths (Reception B). In Reception A, the English lesson concerned firstly learning how to recognise and pronounce the sound /k/, then learning the formula “I went to...” and lastly the sound /e/ and the words that start with that letter. In particular, the first activity has been made through the help of songs of the alphabet (to learn the sound). In Reception C, where I also assisted to an English lesson, they focused on the sound /c/-/k/ and cVc words. In this class, more than in the other classes of Reception, the level of children is not uniform. According to the teacher, this difference could be both advantageous and disadvantageous: advantages come from making the children work in groups, so they can develop the consciousness to help those in difficulty; disadvantages because some children have to make more effort than others and sometimes they do not reach the same level. In Reception B, on the other hand, I observed the class during a Math lesson. Despite the age of children, Maths is not intended as a simple introduction, but as a proper subject: in that lesson children repeated numbers from 1 to 20 and they started additions. The majority could easily recognise the numbers but they make a big effort in writing them in the right way.

Despite their young age, the majority of children speak English quite normally; however, some episodes of interference and code-mixing happen quite usually:

7) “I went *con* my mother...”

8) “Can you *darmi la colla*, please?”

And sometimes they shifted into Italian:

9) “*Mi passi il grigio*”

In this case, other children step in and correct the child that talks in Italian or most of time teachers answer in English.

#### 4.4.1.2 Year 1

Year 1 corresponds to the Italian “*Prima Elementare*” and welcomes children from Reception. Thanks to the work done in the previous year, in Year 1 the English level should be uniform, however, this does not happen because of the different personal approach each child has with the English language.

In Year 1, the children also start learning Italian that is taught as a second language. Year 1 is also composed by three classes with different percentages of Italian native speaker students: in 1A 90% are Italian, in 1B 74% are Italian and in 1C 75%. Despite the high percentage of Italian students, the English level is still uneven: in particular in 1B, where 73% of students are Italian, there are also 5 children who do not speak English at all given that they have skipped the Reception stage. According to the teachers, after two months of the immersion program, they start understanding English.

As already mentioned, the activities done are common to all the classes and, also in the case of Year 1 each morning starts with the headcount on the carpet. The first class I observed was 1A during the Italian lesson: in particular, in this lesson, there was the introduction of the delicate theme of the week: bullying. The method used to guide children into the discovery of this topic consisted of a Little Ghost puppet that tells a story to the children. Through this Ghost, the children become aware of new sounds and the topics of the day for the whole school year. This method is very useful because children learn something new

through fun and they enjoy the stories so they understand and remember the topic in a better way.

In Year 1 children improved writing and logical skills, in particular after having formulated some thoughts about the story told by the little ghost, the teacher wrote those thoughts on the board to let children copy.

After this activity, the children concentrated on a photocopy on the letter M and the syllables MA-ME-MI-MO-MU.

After the Italian lesson, I stayed on the same class (1A) for the English lesson that took place after the break. The children, coming into the class, shifted naturally into English at the sight of their English teacher. After the usual presentation, and the presentation of the daily topic: the Lion hunt, the children watched a video on the song twice and then they repeated it. Repetition is a very common method in order to encourage children to learn sentences by heart in a different language, especially when they are so young. After the video, the teacher explained the sound of the week /tʃ/ and new words that include this sound; furthermore, the children were divided into groups and each group was in charge to learn by heart a part of the song. It was a very dynamic lesson where children learnt new topics having fun. Moreover, the teacher gave me the opportunity to test the different levels of English in the class by hearing two children reading: while the former read perfectly, the latter had still important gaps in reading and pronunciation, for example reading /u/ instead of /ʌ/. Also in 1 B there was an English lesson: here, not only I observed but I also participated in helping the weakest children to reinforce and improve their skills. We mainly worked on the graphemes ck-ff-ll through exercises of matching the sounds with the words that contain these sounds, while the class worked on the sound /u/ recognising it and stretching some words that contain this sound. The next activity for these children consisted in writing their own version of the story “We’re going on a lion hunt”.

In the last class of Year 1, 1 C, I took part to an Italian lesson: during these hours the children listened to another story of the Little Ghost with included words starting with the syllables: BA-BE-BI-BO-BU: the topic of the day. They also did some exercises on these syllables trying to recognise them in some words, and then they all wrote these syllables in their notebook according to the English script. This is a peculiar aspect of the English International School: unlike children at the Italian school that learn capital letters and joined up writing, at the EISP children learn to write only through the English script for they are not confused while shifting between English and Italian.

Concerning the level of the language, I had the opportunity to observe children speaking and writing both in Italian and in English. In particular, the most peculiar problem is interferences: a child writing in Italian often confused I with Y, furthermore they have some difficulties with hard sounds. After the break they shifted automatically in English, separating properly the two languages, even if pronunciation is still imperfect. The level of the English language is very uneven, especially in classes with a high number of children that have never been schooled before: in some cases, if the child cannot reach the level established, he/she must repeat the year. Despite an imbalanced level of the language, the majority spoke fluently and used also simple but various adjectives (itchy, gigantic).

#### 4.4.2 Week two

During my second week at the English International School, I observed in particular the third year, that according to the teachers is one of the most troubling year because of the vivacity of the children and the international environment of the classes: in fact; here, more than in the other classes, there is a high percentage of foreign students.

I took part at lessons of Italian, English and Maths. According to the teachers, the other subjects, such as History, Geography, Science and Art, are made in form of laboratories: this method leads children to learn by having experience. In this way they understand how natural, geographical and historical phenomena occur, and in the same time fix terminology in their mind, which is easily recalled by the fact that they haven't just learnt but they have experienced that particular fact.

The first class I observed was 3D during the Italian lesson. This class was very dynamic and children were 7-8 years old. The topic of the week was "*La fiaba*" (the fable): they reflected upon the parts of the fable, and in the end they had to write their own fable. After this activity they started to talk about grammatical categories, in particular the name. I also observed this class during an English lesson, where the topic of the week was "Myths and Legends". This allows children to follow similar path both in Italian and in English, in order to learn and classify the literary genre in both languages. They also had to invent funny-silly sentences with random words given by the teacher: the goal was to let children learn new words and to locate those words in a proper context.

The second class I observed was 3B; here, children were 8 years old and only 68% were Italian native speakers. This class has been very interesting because of the multicultural environment created by the high percentage of foreign children; furthermore, I had the opportunity to observe how the same topic has been treated by different classes: also in 3B, indeed, the Italian lesson dealt with the fairy tale, such as in the previous class. I assisted also to a Geometry lesson focusing on polygons: children learnt notions and the appropriate vocabulary of the domain.

Due to the high number of foreign children, there are various levels of English language in the class; furthermore, children are accustomed to new entries of foreign children and this is very useful in order to create a multicultural and open-minded mentality.

3C has been the most international class of the school: here 57% of the children were Italian Native speakers. I assisted to a Maths lesson where children should subtract



using borrowings: as the English script, also the method used for subtraction was different from the Italian one. I did not simply observe, but I also helped a group to potentiate their weakness with subtraction: I really noticed a great difference between those who attended the Nursery and those who did not. However, between those who attended the Nursery the 90% have a very good English level and are very confident with the language. Peculiar is the example of a child who speaks four languages: for him English comes not naturally and he shows difficulties in writing and speaking.

In 3A, almost all the class is Italian native speaker, 80% in fact are children born and grown in Italy by an Italian monolingual family. Here the activities done were different from those done until now: I assisted to a Geography test and then to a Music lesson: children, indeed, had to prepare the Christmas concert for the families. According to the teacher, this is another important moment to learn: all songs, in fact, are in English and children agree with the fact that through these songs they have learnt a lot of new words.

As in Year 1, a common problem of Year 3 consists on interferences of English while writing in Italian (I > io) and Italian while speaking in English:

At the question of the teacher: - Why is this a regular polygon?-

The answer: - Because if I have a 3 cm side and a 4 cm side and a 10 cm side, then it comes a *pastrocch*<sup>33</sup>-

Actually, this interference hides a more complicated reasoning than just an interference between two languages: the child here wanted to express a concept but he did not recall that particular word in English so he used the Italian word he knew by transposing it into English. In case of a simple interference he would have said: “*pastroccio*”, instead, conscious to speak English, he tried to translate (in his own way) the word.

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<sup>33</sup> ‘*Pastroccio*’ is a colloquial and dialectal word for doodle.

#### 4.4.3 Week three

The last week spent at the EISP, I observed Year 5, in particular 5A and 5B. Here the percentage of Italian native speakers with Italian monolingual families is very high; however, there are still differences in the level of the English language. This year is crucial for the children's education because at the end of the year they will be tested by an Italian commission in all the subjects, in order to verify if they are going at the same pace with the Italian public school. For this reason, to be prepared at their best, children are systematically tested by their Italian teacher in each subject: this means studying each subject twice. The amount of homework increases considerably and children need to be very concentrated on their schoolwork.

During these weeks I took part above all to Italian lessons focused on poetry, reading novels, writing a yellow story, the grammatical aspect of subjunctive and the period analysis.

Considering the fact that Italian is taught as second language, these literary and grammatical topics are exhaustively developed, according to the guidelines established by the Italian Ministry of Education, but also quite advanced.

I also took part to English lessons, where children had to prepare their part of the Christmas concert; and also the Maths lesson: after a first time where they did individual activities, I helped some children in strengthening topics that they had not understood.

Year 5 is an important year: children talk naturally in English, reaching a very high level in fluency and ability to separate Italian and English. According to the teacher most of the morphological interferences that characterised the past years were almost disappeared (a part from some episodes where children wrote -ph instead of -f during the Italian lesson); however, syntactic interference is more common. This could be noticed in particular in Italian, due to the fact that children started writing in English and the syntactic order of English is the first to be consciously acquired.

After Year 5 children are free to go on with their bilingual education enrolling in the Middle School; however, some of them also decide to enrol in an Italian Public Middle School: this choice is possible thanks to the Italian commission that evaluates the children at the end of the year.

My observation during these three weeks had the main purpose to verify how this academic bilingual education took place; in particular, if for an Italian monolingual family is possible to give their child a two-in-one education. For this reason, after having observed how children approached to the daily scholastic routine, I concluded this experience by asking the children and teachers questions in order to know their views on this bilingual education.

#### 4.5 Italian children's view on bilingual education

Considering that bilingual education concerns and affects children's everyday life; after the observations in the classes, I found it very interesting to listen to what children think about this experience, what they feel and how they consider these two languages that articulate their everyday life.

During the three weeks, I interacted with children who told me some anecdotes concerning their bilingual education; furthermore, I also met three groups of children corresponding to the years observed, in order to see how they experience their education.

During these meetings I prepared some questions to ask to the children concerning their view on bilingual education. The questions asked, were the same for each group of children in order to understand better the differences or the similarities that can exist between these children who share this educational experience.

The first group I talked with, was five children of Year 1, four children were Italian and a child was Italo-American. During my interviews I always talked with the children in English; however, one of the most curious things that happened in this

first meeting, was the fact that children started answering in English but then, when they discovered that I was Italian, they stopped talking to me in English and they wished to switch into Italian, for this reason our conversation was in both languages. During this first meeting I did not hold a long conversation with the children, because they were tired after all the lessons of the morning and also small children easily get bored with answering a lot of questions. What emerged from their answers is a quite good fluency in English, which is certainly not perfect but that shows self-confidence in speaking this language. Sometimes children shifted from English to Italian, however this shifting happened not because of their uncertainty about a word, but rather because they were tired. This can be noticed in the last part of the interview where, the majority started talking in Italian; but, when I switched the question in English they took a more disciplined attitude: this must be related to the fact that they connect English with school and discipline and Italian with playtime, friends and family, so to a more relaxed attitude. Asking the questions I did not force anyone to answer, in fact there were some children that in some cases did not feel like answering, and another that, instead, gave me complete and motivated answers. Concerning the status that English covers in their life, as already mentioned, it is the language of the school, and at the question if speaking both languages was difficult for them, they all answered “No”. In particular, a child, claimed that speaking two languages is very helpful, especially in those cases where he did not remember a word, so he tried transforming an Italian word into an English. The same thing happens with the fact that they found natural to speak both English and Italian. All but one answered that, to them, it is quite the same thing speaking in English, rather than Italian. A child also added that he knows English better than Italian, and another said that she preferred Italian. They are also conscious of the fact that their English has improved since their first years in Nursery or Reception. I further asked them if they speak English at home and after school; however, only two out five children speak completely in Italian at home, the other speak both English and Italian, in particular the former is spoken with parents and some members of the family.

The second group I met was Year 3 and I interviewed four children. As already noticed during the observation of the classes, the level of English is different and this could be noticed also in the completeness of the answers given by the children. All the children really enjoy this school because of the projects done, and because of the languages spoken: in their opinion this is very useful when travelling abroad. Three out four also find difficult to speak both Italian and English; in particular one said that this difficulty is due to the fact that at home he speaks Italian and English at school, so when he is at home he easily gets mixed up, another added that it is hard to remember everything in both languages and that she dreads confusing herself and she does not like making mistakes. A girl affirmed that sometimes she does her Italian homework writing in English and vice-versa.

They also talked to me about their attitude in speaking both languages and, three out four revealed that they first think in Italian and then they translate into English. Only one child said that she speaks better in English than in Italian. They are all very confident with the language and this is also demonstrated by the fact that they all started learning English at the Nursery. Considering their attitude towards English outside school, one child out four speaks only in Italian; the others speak English also with the Italian parents and a child even corrects her mother when she speaks English. At the end of the meeting one child claimed that he feels very lucky for learning two languages together and he would like that all the children could have the same opportunity.

The last group I met was six children in Year 5. In this case the meeting lasted more than the others because children discussed the question I asked them a long time, providing rich answers. They all have a different reason why they enjoy that school: some of them because of friends, or a pleasant environment; others said that here people help you when you are in a difficult situation and if you have a problem there are helpers to take care of you. In this way, from the answers, one can understand that school not only is a place where children find friends but also a safe place where they feel protected and where they gladly stay. Unlike the children of the previous

Years, when I asked them if they find difficult to speak both Italian and English, this group answered me that there is no difficulty in speaking two languages. Three children out of six, in fact have attended the EISP since Nursery. Only two started attending the school from Reception, and a child arrived in Year 2. Concerning their attitude toward English at the beginning of their education, a child clarified that he remembers that at the Nursery he did not understand anything and another added that he learnt through examples: the teacher wrote window on a piece of paper and then she stuck it on the window. A girl highlighted the fact that at Nursery she had a book and if she spoke English all the time she finally would have obtained a sticker, so she was very motivated to speak English. They also discussed what studying every subject in English means to them, and while someone thinks that it is stressful but at the same time pleasant, another really likes this challenge seeing this opportunity as a help for the future. Another boy, instead, thinks that it is really hard because subjects must be studied twice (English and Italian) and that means a lot to study in few time. At this stage of their educational instruction they have acquired a good knowledge of English and they express this confidence in switching between the two languages naturally, except one child that openly said that English does not come so naturally as Italian does. A girl added that sometimes she needs to explain something in Italian and she does not remember the word in Italian but only in English. We also talked about when they started speaking in English, and some of them even remember the precise period: a girl told us that firstly she thought it was very difficult, but then she started watching dvd in English and after her mum's help she started trying to speak English. Another said that she started speaking English at Reception thanks to the spelling lessons, and another claimed that, always in Reception class, the teacher continued to correct her in English, so she started understanding how that language works. English, however, most of time remains connected to school: three out six rarely speak both languages at home; while the others speak Italian. The last point we discussed concerned the importance that this language represents in their life.

They all agreed the fact that English is important not only from a scholastic point of view; but most of all, from a social, a communicative and cultural point of view:

“English is important because it is universal and I feel lucky because I can speak it.”<sup>34</sup>

Through these interviews one can notice how, as children grow, there is also a maturation of the consciousness connected to these two languages affecting their lives.

#### 4.6 Teachers' view on bilingual education

After having talked with the children of the school, it was interesting to listen to the teachers' point of view, who share the educational path with the children. In collaboration with the Headmistress, we organised a meeting with two Italian teachers and an English teacher who I met during the period spent at the school. During our meeting we discussed, above all, on children's attitude toward the school and toward the two languages they use everyday. Talking with them was very interesting because they were able to give feedback concerning the bilingual path of the children, especially concerning the most common mistakes found during their experience. In fact, one of the first questions I asked them, concerned the kind of interference they find in children; while one Italian teacher said that the most common was the structure of the sentence, in particular, adjective-substantive inversion, another Italian teacher claimed that she had not noticed any particular interference. At any rate, in Year 5 these interferences tend to disappear or reduce, on condition that children work correctly both at school and at home. In fact, as one teacher claimed, if the child works at home, if he reads and makes an effort to reduce these interferences, so the gap will be solved; on the other hand, if the child does not applies, then interferences continue. We also talked about the level of study of Italian

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<sup>34</sup> Based on a Year 3 child's answer.

language, and according to one Italian teacher, the level is exactly the same as children attending the Italian school, except for writing skills, where they should work more at home because the time spent at school in doing this activity is a bit scarce and should be reinforced.

Concerning refusal episodes, the first Italian teacher I spoke to, assured me that she had never faced such type of episodes; however, when children have just arrived at the Elementary school and the percentage of English lessons is high, they cannot wait for speaking Italian during their Italian lessons. She continued claiming that, growing up, this reaction disappears because they become more confident with the English language and they do not feel the need to speak only Italian. Our conversation also concerned difficulties in learning that, according to the teacher, do not affect the learning mechanism of grammar rules rather than the acquisition of the Italian phonology and orthography. Children tend to reinforce English soft sounds that are completely different from Italian ones, e.g. /tʃ/ rather than /k/ for morphemes like –chi/–che. She remarked that the children’s difficulty does not lie in grammar rules, because they use to learn grammar according to the English approach, which is more experiential than theoretical (such as the Italian one); in fact, they start from experience to get to the theoretical rule; while Italians start from the rule to get to the application. She concluded claiming that the most common mistakes to eradicate are the soft sounds, the syntactical structure and the use of prepositions: indeed, the children tend to reproduce English prepositions in Italian, such as: *Vado in Padova*.

The same mistake has been noticed also by the other Italian teacher who teaches in different classes. Unlike the former teacher, the latter did not notice any particular syntactic interference in her classes. However, she noticed some interference in Italian concerning the use of personal pronouns: children were studying that topic in English and they applied it also to the Italian language. She also talked about the most common mistakes in class, especially concerning the spelling of vowels and morphemes: /u/ is written instead of closed /o/ and –sh is written instead of the



Italian –sc. She also agreed on the fact that in Year 5 the majority of problems (interference, English and Italian sounds) are solved, pointing out that it depends on the work that the child does, not only at school but also at home. We also talked about the children’s vocabulary, which she curiously noticed to be richer and more specific in “real” bilinguals<sup>35</sup> than in Italian children. She added that they both start with a limited vocabulary, but then bilingual children tend to improve their vocabulary more quickly. Effectively, this aspect is quite interesting and in her opinion some research should be conducted on this topic. The children, in fact, are exposed to a good quality of input and they also read several books during the school year. However, this difference in acquiring Italian vocabulary could lend support to the studies (Singh et al., 2014) that show that bilingual children are more reactive and quicker at learning compared to some monolinguals. With this teacher I also discussed episodes of refusal: she had never encountered this phenomenon, except once where she helped a child in need but the reason of the refusal was not to be attributed to bilingualism rather than to external and social factors.

The last teacher I spoke to was an English teacher. At the beginning we talked about the different level of English in class, and she explained the decision to create groups of children of the same level: in each class there are generally four groups: weaker, lower, normal and accelerators. These groups can be interchanged for subjects like Art, History, and Science, but for subjects like English or Maths, she prefers keeping children in their original group in order to strengthen and follow personally their weaknesses. She also claimed that these differences in level depends not only on the moment when children started the school, but also on the natural aptitude towards languages: there are, in fact, children who are naturally more linguistic than others, and learning two languages comes easier for them. We also discussed the amount of time that a child needs to reach a proficient English level, and according to her experience, children need to be in the school for about two years. She also noticed

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<sup>35</sup> She defined real bilinguals those children who are native speakers of two languages.

that at the beginning a lot of children feel a bit nervous and anxious because they want to be understood, so she speaks to them only in English (even at the beginning a lot continue responding in Italian) for about three months, and after that period they start being fully receptive to this language. On the other hand, she has rarely encountered episodes of confusion: her lesson is after Italian and when she enters the class each morning they always address her in English. However, she recognises that children love speaking Italian and that they cannot wait for their Italian lessons. We also discussed the exposure of children to the language and she added that they tend to have weaker English after summer holidays because the majority of them do not use English at home. However, this is not a disadvantage: after all, children must not be forced to speak always English and they all associate English with the school and the teachers: that's why when children meet their English teacher outside the school they automatically speak to her in English. Concerning the mistakes children used to make, she mentioned some interference with Italian spelling, for example "*cioccolate*" instead of "chocolate", and, similarly to her Italian colleagues, the use of prepositions: e.g. "I went at school" instead of "I went to school". At any rate, the biggest difficulty for children is accent, which is really difficult to get; indeed, she thinks that only living abroad for a long period could be enough to solve the accent difficulty.

As one can see, the teachers had different perspectives and different experiences, however they all agreed on the fact that all children have a positive response from this bilingual education. According to them, they not only work on their linguistic and scholastic abilities, but they also have the opportunity to grow up in a multicultural environment due to the mix of cultures present in each class. Certainly, their bilingual education does not end with Elementary school: all children need, in fact, to continue their educational path in order to reach perfect bilingualism.



## V. THE SECOND LANGUAGE AT HOME APPROACH

### 5.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter analysed the possibility for Italian families to provide a bilingual education through the school system, this chapter will explore in depth the opportunity chosen by some families to teach a second language to their children. Some families try to educate their children bilingually at home: this is the situation of several families made up of parents with different nationalities who decide to speak a second language to their children in order to transmit the linguistic heritage of both parents. Recently, this opportunity has become topic of interest for families who are not native speakers of a second language, but, thanks to an advanced proficiency in a second language, they are able to speak that second language to their children at home. This type of education, however, may raise some questions about the efficacy of the method, due to the fact that those parents are not native speakers of the second language spoken. It will explore in depth the experience of some Italian families who have taken on the challenge of speaking two or more languages at home, and at the end the effectiveness of this type of education will be discussed.

### 5.2 The second language at home approach

This chapter studies the choice of some Italian families living in Italy to bring up their children speaking a language other than Italian. It has not been possible to find previous studies on this topic: the literature consulted does not deal with such experiences in Italy or abroad, for this reason the only source of information available has been the Internet, and, in particular, the social network Facebook has represented an incredible source of material. There, indeed, I joined a group of

parents<sup>36</sup> that are raising their children bilingually and share their experience with other parents who have made the same choice. This group is useful, not only for sharing experiences, but, above all, to express doubts, worries, progress made by children, advice, methods and material to pursue this goal. All these people aim to bring up their children through speaking a second language, and this is possible thanks to different methods they have adopted: some use the OPOL method, others, instead use the Time and Place approach and others try to reach the aim through the help of external people such as au-pairs, second language speaker nannies or native speaker teachers.

The OPOL method has already been discussed in chapter 3 (p.79), and concerns the choice of a non-native speaker parent to speak that second language to his/her child, while the other parent speaks Italian to the child. The Time and Place method consists in organising some daily activities, for a limited amount of time entirely in the second language. There will be the creation of a sort of ritual that occurs between the parent and the child/children, and this ritual has a specific purpose: every time that the children will perform that particular activity with their parent, they will connect that activity to the second language.

About 600 parents are enrolled in the Facebook group, for this reason, a questionnaire was submitted to the group, in order to simplify the data collection.

### 5.3 The sample analysed and the questionnaire

The questionnaire I created aimed to simplify the data collection of the parents' experiences, but, above all, to provide a clearer and more specific vision of this interesting phenomenon.

The sample analysed corresponds to several parents enrolled in the Facebook group "*Bilinguismo in famiglie monolingui*" and other parents found on Facebook pages.

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<sup>36</sup>*Bilinguismo in famiglie monolingui*, available at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/524067714372037/?fref=ts>

Thanks to the group administrator, I posted the link of the questionnaire on Facebook and, after five days, I collected responses from 33 parents who completed the questionnaire 35 times and their answers involved 38 children. This is due to the fact that I asked them to fill in the questionnaire once for each child: each child, indeed, has individual attitudes and reactions to input. In the form there are 36 questions (see Appendix A): some multiple-choice questions and some open-ended questions. The questionnaire is divided into the following sections: *Background*, *Early milestones*, question about parents, relatives and the child, and a last section about the child and parent's attitude. In the *Background* I collected some general information such as gender, the age of the child, the second language spoken, parent's education and the level of proficiency of the language spoken by the parent. *Early milestones* focuses on the bilingual experience, while the three sections after the early milestones section poses questions on parents, relatives and the child. The last section deals with the child and parent's attitude towards the two languages spoken.

In the following sections there are the analyses of the data collected divided into the same sections of the questionnaire.

### 5.3.1 Analysis of the data: *Background*

In the *Background* section I collected some data in order to have a general view of some broad factors, i.e.: the gender of the parent, the age of the child, the second language adopted, the child's onset age of this experience, how parents acquired the second language and a self-evaluation of the parents' second language current level.

All parents that filled in the form are mothers. Fathers may also involved in this experience, however, this data clarifies that the majority of the bilingual education is a task fulfilled by mothers. As we can see in Figure 2, the most spoken language is English, which has been chosen by 85% of the mothers (30 answers out of 35), the

second language spoken is French (2 out of 35), while 1 mother has chosen to speak German, and two mothers have chosen to raise their child speaking not only a second but also a third language, in particular French-Spanish and French-English.

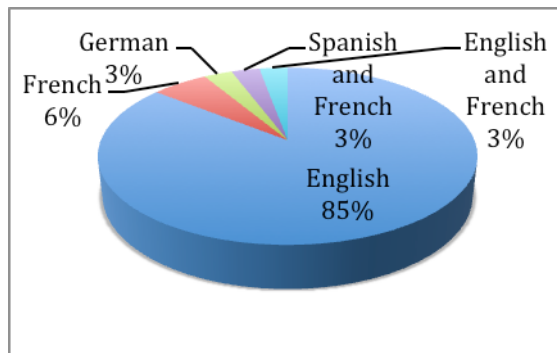


Figure 2: languages spoken

As already mentioned in the dissertation a fundamental factor that influences the acquisition of the language is the quality of input, for this reason, in this section I focused on the past experiences of the mothers that allowed them to master a second language.

The majority (11 out of 35) acquired the second language at school and then cultivated the language individually: through language courses, private lessons, travel, work; 9 out 35 acquired the language through school and stayed abroad for study or work reasons; 8 out 35 have a degree in Foreign Languages or Interpreting and Translating Studies. Others, instead, acquired the second language through intensive courses (2 out of 35), work (1), private conversations (1) and from birth (1). I also asked for a self-evaluation of their level of language and the results are: 37.1% of them have a “Near-native” level, while 31.4 have an “Advanced” level and another 31.4% have an “Intermediate” level.

In this first general part, I also focused on the current age of their children in order to see the average of children’s age who are experiencing this approach. As can be seen from Figure 3, the majority of the children (17 children out of 38) are between 2 and

4 years old, while 13 out of 38 are 4-6 years old. 5 children are between 0 and 2 years old, while 3 children are between 6 and 9 years old.

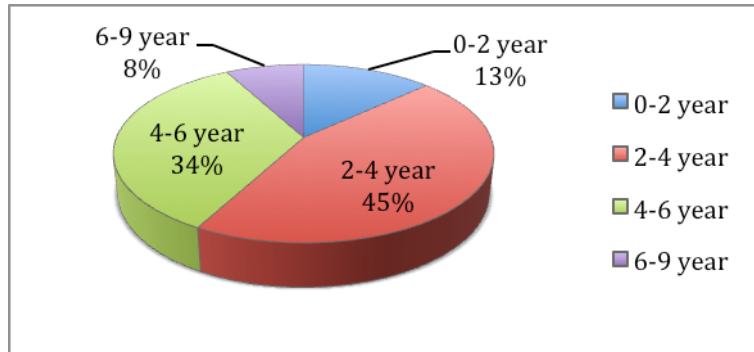


Figure 3: Percentage of the age of children

According to a recent study conducted by Dr. Partanen et al. (2013); the period of pregnancy is fundamental for the child's language acquisition because children learn to discriminate sounds of different languages, in particular they say that: "prenatal experiences have a remarkable influence on the brain's auditory discrimination accuracy, which may support, for example, language acquisition during infancy." For this reason, the parents were asked to state when they started speaking a second language to their child/children. The results are that only 4 mothers started speaking the second language during pregnancy; 18 started at the birth of the child, 3 started after 5 months and 7 started after a year from the child's birth. Particularly, a mother experiencing the second language approach with their two children claimed that she started 15 months after the first baby's birth, instead with the second child she started at the birth: she was already speaking the second language to her first child, however, she recognised the benefits in starting speaking a language since the new-born's first moments of life.



### 5.3.2 Early Milestones

In the second section, I focused in particular on how and when parents organised the exposition of the two languages at home and when the children uttered their first word.

My first question focuses on the reason and the moment when parents planned to introduce a second language to the child. Certainly, the reasons and the moments are different for each mother, for example, some of them thought about this opportunity before the child's birth:

*“Da ragazzina ho fatto da baby sitter a tre bambini che parlavano francese (con la mamma), italiano (col papà) e stavano imparando lo spagnolo perchè da poco trasferiti in Spagna. Pensai che se avessi avuto un figlio non avrei dovuto perdere l'occasione di esporlo da subito ad una seconda lingua. Ho mantenuto la mia promessa, a mio figlio appena nato tutte le azioni quotidiane le ho fatte commentandole in inglese, tutto poi ha seguito la sua crescita.”<sup>37</sup>*

*“Molto prima che nascesse... Direi una decina di anni prima della nascita sulla esempio di un collega che lo fece allora con la figlia col tedesco, con grande successo”<sup>38</sup>*

*“Prima che mio figlio nascesse, mi sono informata su come potessi fare a crescerlo bilingue. E' sempre stato un mio desiderio, dal momento in cui ho pensato di avere un bambino e mi sono quindi mossa di conseguenza (ho letto libri e ho iniziato a rispolverare il mio inglese con lezioni private).”<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>37</sup> “When I was teenager, I looked after three children who spoke French with their mum and Italian with their dad. Furthermore, they also were starting to acquire Spanish because they moved to Spain. I thought that if I had children, I would expose them to a second language since their first moments of life. And so I did, I started speaking to my new-born child in English during our daily routine, and we continued for all his growth.”

<sup>38</sup> “(I started planning a second language home approach) long before my child's birth; about ten years before his birth, following the example of a colleague who successfully spoke German to his daughter”

<sup>39</sup> “Before my child's birth, I found out about how to bring up my child bilingually. A bilingual education has always been a wish, so when I decided to have a baby I started planning a second language approach (I read books, I started reviewing my English through private lessons)”

As one can see, these mothers decided to plan a bilingual upbringing before their children's birth and thanks to different factors that influenced this choice: a mother decided a bilingual upbringing after having experienced the benefits of such education through her past experience of baby-sitting; another observed the successful bilingual upbringing of a colleague's child. The third mother was moved by her curiosity and wish to raise a child bilingually so she started inquiring about this type of education.

There are also other mothers who, instead, made this decision after the birth of their child:

*“Da un articolo sul giornale che mi ha sottoposto mio marito che parlava di questa esperienza. Mi ha detto: dato che tu sei così brava con l'inglese perchè non proviamo? All'inizio non ero convintissima, ma ho provato e vedendo che mia figlia rispondeva bene, mi sono convinta a percorrere questa strada.”<sup>40</sup>*

*“Per passione, quando è nata la mia bimba<sup>41</sup>”*

As one can notice, these mothers all have different stories about how and why they decided to raise their children bilingually, however, all of them have in common a love for the second language spoken, a great curiosity and inventiveness that allow them to begin this project.

Planning the introduction of a second language needs also a strategy to make sure that the acquisition of both languages is optimal. Given that the language exposure is a necessary input for the child, it must be constant so I asked the parents how they organised the transmission of the two languages. The majority of the parents use the OPOL approach, however there are different ways of performing this method. These ways may be seen in Figure 4: it represents the way that the family decided to organise the two languages spoken at home during the day. The majority of the mothers (41%), who completed the questionnaire, speaks Italian at home; however,

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<sup>40</sup> “(I decided to start a bilingual upbringing) thanks to an article in a newspaper that my husband gave me. He told me: given that you are so proficient in English, why don't we try? At the beginning I was not so sure about this project, but I tried and after my child's progress I decided to go on.

<sup>41</sup> “(I started) after my daughter's birth thanks to the love I have for the second language.

during the day, these mothers address their children using a second language (SL). 32% of the mothers who completed the questionnaire, speaks always the SL at home while the father always speaks Italian.

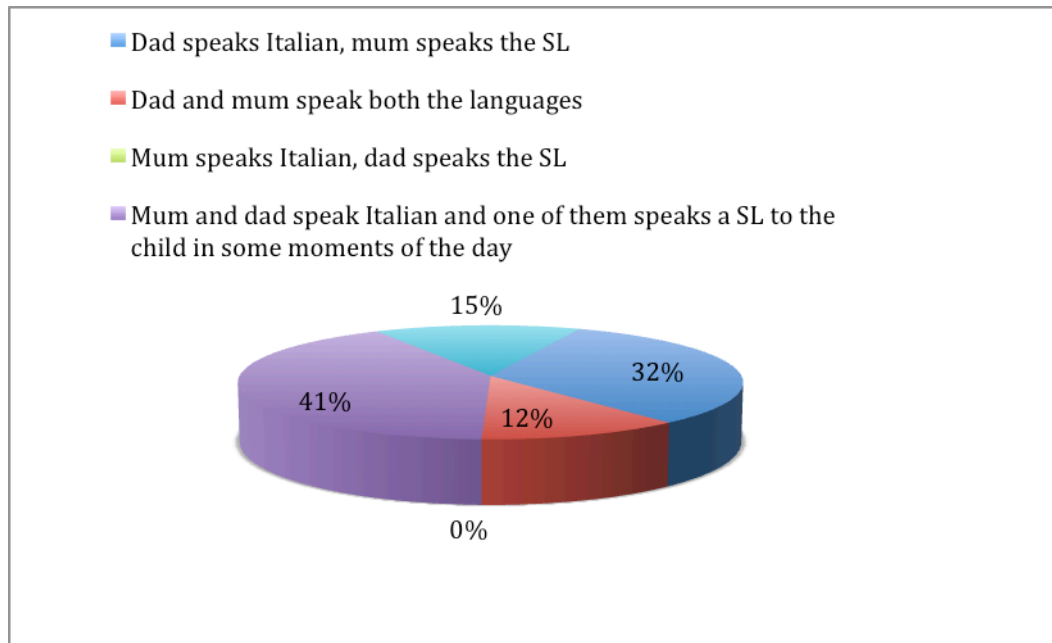


Figure 4: Organisation of the two languages spoken at home

15% of the parents, who indicated “Other” as response, organised the second language exposure in a different way. Their motivations are in this case different for each situation, however, the majority that selected this option, takes advantage of external help such as au pairs, private lessons with native speakers, English playgroups and intensive courses. For example, a mother’s approach consists in:

*“2 giorni a settimana ho una tata che parla inglese per 1 ora e mezza, 3 gg a settimana corso d inglese, io tutte le sere cerco di leggere in inglese libri ;per un’ ora cartoni quasi tutti in inglese e quando posso parlo anche in inglese (ma dipende da quanto sono stanca). Ora mi sto attrezzando per una ragazza alla pari per qualche mese”<sup>42</sup>*

<sup>42</sup> “Two days per week, a nanny, who speaks English, comes to our house for 1 and a-half hours; 3 days per week there is an English course and every evening I try to read English books to my child. Furthermore, my child watches English cartoons for one hour everyday, and when I can, I also speak English (it depends how tired I am). Now I am looking for an au-pair girl”.

I also concentrated on when the child uttered his first word because several parents, who are sharing the practice of raising their child bilingually, are worried about a delay in speaking. Considering that this experience is very personal, I asked the parents how they consider the moment of their child's first word, compared to the children of the same age.

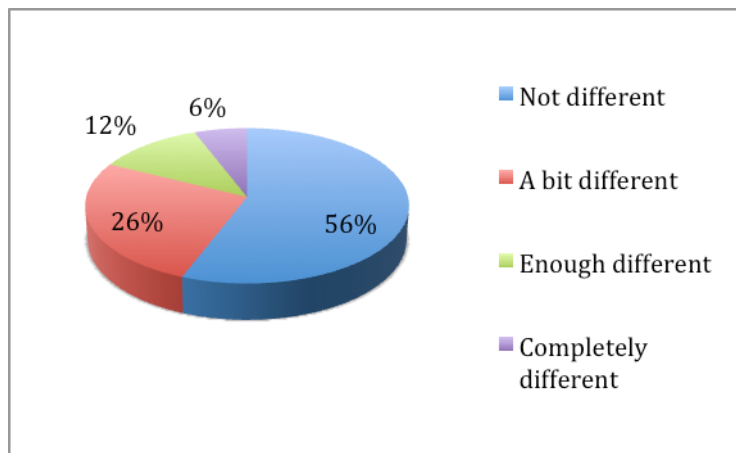


Figure 5: How different is your child's linguistic development compared to those of other children?

As one can notice, from Figure 5, the majority of the mothers think that their child is similar to other children, while 2 out of 33 mothers think that their child is completely different. In the first of these two cases, the child spoke for the first time with a small delay compared to the average; in the second case the reason has to be attributed to some developmental problems that also affected the language acquisition. At any rate, this last instance has been solved and the child is now fluent in both languages.

### 5.3.3. Questions on the parent speaking the second language

The third section of the questionnaire concerns the respondents, that is the parent who speaks the second language at home. As already seen, time is one of the most important factors in the exposure to a second language, for this reason I investigated the amount of time that a mother spends with her child speaking in Italian, and the amount of time spent speaking a Second Language. From Figures 5 and

6 we can see that during the day 53% of the children are more exposed to Italian, while 39% of them use the Second Language when they speak to their children most of the time.

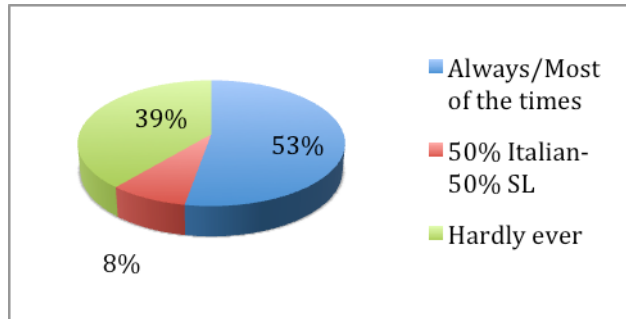


Figure 5: Amount of time spoken in Italian at home

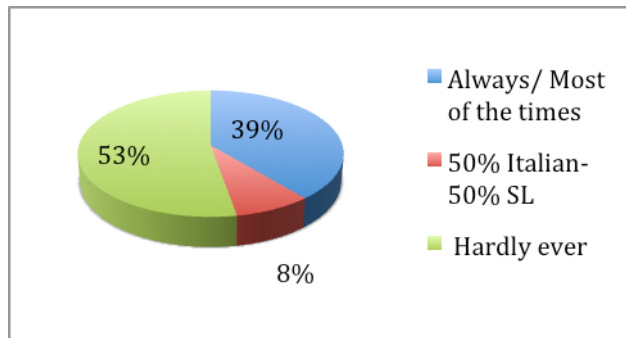


Figure 6: Amount of time spoken in the second language at home

These data, however, are influenced by some other factors. Several mothers added some comments in order to clarify how they spend time with their children:

*“Prima dell'arrivo dell'au pair, mi rivolgevo al bambino in inglese solo in determinati momenti della giornata (cambio del pannolino, momenti di gioco insieme), per un totale di un'ora e mezza circa. Con l'au pair, mi rivolgo al bambino in inglese per il 70 % del tempo.”<sup>43</sup>*

Another mother specifies the activities they do in the second language:

*“Quando guardiamo il dvd di Hocus e Lotus, quando leggiamo delle storie, quando contiamo i gradini delle scale, quando apparecchiamo il tavolo, quando giochiamo.”<sup>44</sup>*

<sup>43</sup> “Before the au-pair’s arrival, I spoke English to the child only in precise moments of the day (the change of the nappy, or during playtime), for about one hour and half. Thanks to the au-pair’s help, I speak English to my child 70% of time”.

<sup>44</sup> “When we watch Hocus and Lotus dvd, when we read stories, when we count the steps of the stair, when we set the table or when we play”.

As one can notice, 53% of the mothers hardly ever speaks a second language during the day. This happens because the majority dedicates a fixed amount of time per day speaking in a second language:

*“penso che in tutto siamo intorno alle 2 o 3 ore, a parte i mesi estivi, durante i quali ospitiamo una ragazza alla pari , in quel caso l'esposizione copre quasi tutta la giornata”<sup>45</sup>*

*“ parliamo inglese intorno alle due ore al giorno ”<sup>46</sup>*

From these comments we can notice that even if the mothers speak the second language to their children for a fixed amount of time, they perform a number of activities with their children in the second language in order to improve as much as they can their vocabulary; others, instead, also take advantage of external help such as the au-pairs: native speakers of the second language who go to a foreign country to learn or improve the language and is hosted in a house as baby sitter. There, they help families with children and they speak their language to the children. It is considered one of the most successful ways for children to learn a foreign language.

I also investigated which language the mothers speak at home with the rest of the people who live in the house (husband, grandmother and/or grandfather): 97.1% answered that they mainly speak Italian, while 2.9% mainly speaks the second language. An important factor to consider is whether the mother works or stays at home with the child every day: 41% of the mothers stay at home, while 59% work. After this question, I asked working mothers whether the caregiver of the child speaks Italian or the second language. The result is that 81% of the mothers leave the child with an Italian caregiver, while 19% leaves the child with a second language speaker: in particular with an English speaker au pair and at a bilingual kindergarten.

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<sup>45</sup> “I think that we speak the second language about two or three hours per day, except for the summer when we host an au-pair girl: in this case the daily exposure covers almost all the day.

<sup>46</sup> “We speak English for about two hours per day”.

In the third part of the questionnaire, I also focused a question on the language that the child speaks with their relatives or to the closest people, and surprisingly, while 81% of the children speak mainly Italian and rarely the second language, 15% of them speak 50% Italian, 50% the second language. These data are unexpected because in some cases, families experiencing a bilingual education at home are often criticised by relatives or friends that do not understand this choice; furthermore, in Italy the bilingual culture is still underdeveloped and the choice of non-native parents to speak a non-native language may seem unusual.

#### 5.3.4 Questions on children

This section focuses on the child's daily exposure to the second language; in particular, parents answered some questions on the kind of activities their children are involved in during the day or during the week and that can help the acquisition of a second language. This section is useful for understanding the types of input that may help the acquisition of the language and also how children speak to their friends or siblings.

As already seen, school is a vehicle of languages, as in case of the English International School, and some parents may be supported by the school in providing such a bilingual experience. For this reason, I investigated the type of school attended (or that will be attended) by the children, in order to see if the majority of them are exposed to a second language only at home or at school as well.

The majority of the children attend an Italian kindergarten (12 out of 38) and the Italian elementary school (7 out of 38), while 10 children stay at home and 3 children go to an Italian nursery school. Of the remaining children, two attend a bilingual nursery school, two children stay at home during the day but regularly

attend an English course and two children follow a particular type of instruction called “home-schooling”<sup>47</sup>.

I also examined the kind of activities in which children are involved to enhance their ability to speak the second language. I compared the same activities both in Italian and in the Second Language; in particular, the parents were asked to indicate the frequency of each activity (if performed every day, once a week or hardly ever).

In Figure 7, I take into consideration the number of children performing an activity every day, in order to see how many children perform that activity in the Second language and how many in Italian:

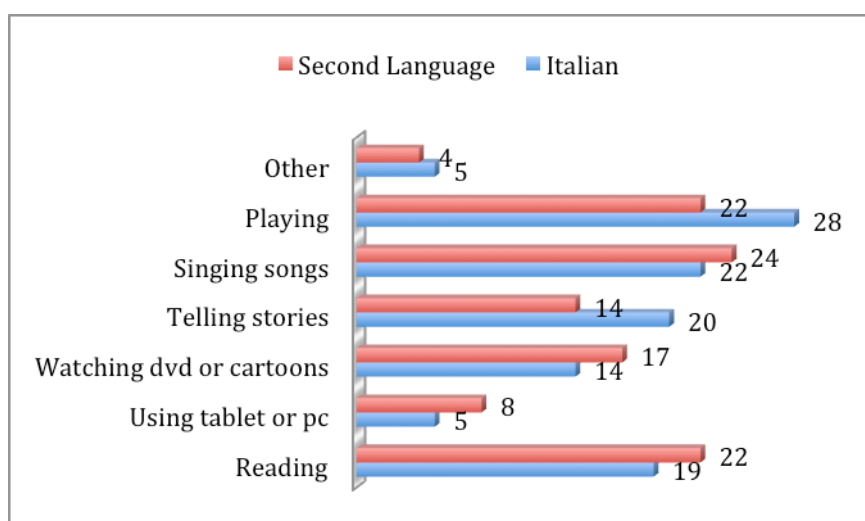


Figure 7: Everyday activities in both languages

In Figure 7 we can notice that there is not a wide difference between the activities in the two languages; it means that the majority of children carry-out an activity in both languages everyday. English is most used in some activities such as singing songs, watching dvds or cartoons, reading and using tablet or pc; while Italian is most used in the remaining activities.

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<sup>47</sup> The practice of educating children at home and not in schools.



Concerning those activities performed in the second language, choosing an activity in the second language is often suggested as a useful method to introduce or to enhance that second language. Children, indeed, enjoy watching cartoons, singing songs, listening to stories and if they carry-out these activities in a second language, they can be expected to acquire words and sentences more easily. This is the goal of singing nursery rhymes in a second language, for example; or watching some cartoons that help children to associate words with objects. Recently, to promote a second language acquisition, the Italian television started to offer some cartoons and TV programs in English. I also investigated how many children perform extra-scholastic activities in the afternoon: the result is that 20 children out of 38 do extra-activities. In particular, half of them do activities such as gymnastics, music and sport in Italian; the other half attend English courses or weekly playgroups in order to improve their second language acquisition. Some children also combine extra-scholastic activities in Italian with a weekly playgroup in the second language, as in these cases:

*“La mia bambina frequenta una scuola di inglese per un'ora alla settimana e una volta a settimana va a lezione di danza.”<sup>48</sup>*

*“Un playgroup in inglese, una volta a settimana, e pattinaggio su rotelle, due - tre volte a settimana (in italiano)”<sup>49</sup>*

After the daily activities, I focused on siblings and friends, asking parents if their children have siblings and which languages they speak together. 52% of children have siblings; however, 44% of them often speak Italian and rarely speak the second language to their siblings. 33% never speak the second language to the siblings and 22% speak 50% Italian and 50% the second language. This data is encouraging because if a child speaks a second language with a sibling, this

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<sup>48</sup> “My daughter attends an English course one hour per week, and once a week she takes ballet lessons.”

<sup>49</sup> “(My child) attends an English playgroup once a week, and two or three times a week he takes rollerblade lessons (in Italian)”

second language has probably the same status than Italian, which is the children's L1.

Regarding the language spoken with friends, only 6% of children speak both languages. The majority 56% speak only Italian and 37% rarely use a second language.

### 5.3.5 Questions about attitude

The last section deals with the child's attitude toward the language and the parent's attitude towards this experience. The children, indeed, are stimulated to speak a language, which is not their native language. For this reason, I investigated the child's language preference; but also, if they have ever had episodes of refusal, confusion or disappointment concerning the second language. The answers demonstrate that 85% of the children prefer speaking Italian, while 15% prefer speaking the second language. This data is quite surprising, considering that the second language spoken is not their native language; however, these children, who prefer speaking the second language, receive a high amount of input during the day, thanks to their mothers and also thanks to some second language courses. I noticed that some of their mothers started speaking the second language at birth or during pregnancy; only one mother started when her child was 6 months old; I also noticed that these children speak 50% second language and 50% Italian with their siblings or friends.

It may happen that a child exposed to two languages may feel uncomfortable with one of them, independently if this language is Italian or the second language. For this reason, I asked the parents to tell me about their children's attitude toward the languages spoken at home. As we can notice from the examples below, each child has a different and individual reaction:

*“non dà nessun cenno di difficoltà ad usare termini italiani e/o inglesi. Ancora parla poco, ha appena compiuto i 2 anni, ma di moltissimi vocaboli conosce il corrispondente*

*in inglese e lo sa usare correttamente. Comprende semplici frasi in inglese e alcuni termini li pronuncia solo in lingua inglese e non conosce la parola italiana.*”<sup>50</sup>

*“E' assolutamente a suo agio, sia a casa che fuori. Non fa differenza, nel senso che non mi chiede mai di parlare L1 e non ha mai avuto il rifiuto. Solo qualche volta ha mostrato fastidio quando ho proposto un cartone animato in L2, ma credo fosse dovuto al fatto che utilizziamo DVD non avendo la TV satellitare e quindi preferiva i canali italiani con quello che passava al momento piuttosto che un dvd già conosciuto.*”<sup>51</sup>

*“E' la normalità: quando gli parlo in inglese, lui risponde in inglese, quando gli parlo in italiano lui risponde in italiano. A volte inizia a parlarmi in inglese di sua spontanea iniziativa. Non parla mai in inglese con i familiari che non lo parlano.*”<sup>52</sup>

*“Credo le sembri normale, ripete le parole nuove in inglese e sembra curiosa*”<sup>53</sup>

From these comments we observe that these children feel comfortable with the second language, have feelings of curiosity and normality; however, there are also different experiences:

*“In principio rifiuto...adesso molto serena*”<sup>54</sup>

*“Mi guarda strano*”<sup>55</sup>

*“Come la sorella, non ha mai avuto un rifiuto, per lei entrambe le lingue sono la normalità. Diversamente dalla sorella però, le proposte di gioco in inglese la mettono un po' più in difficoltà e mischia le due lingue in un bel calderone!”*<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “(My child) has no difficulty in using Italian and/or English terms. He still speaks very little, he’s only two years old but he knows several words both in Italian and in English and he can use each word in its correct context. He understands simple sentences; furthermore, he pronounces some words only in English and he does not know the correct Italian translation.”

<sup>51</sup> “He feels completely comfortable both at home and outside. It makes no difference for him, I mean, he never asks for speaking L1 and he never had episodes of refusal. Sometimes he seemed a little annoyed when I suggested him a cartoon in L2, but I suppose that this feeling rose from the fact that we do not have Pay-tv but only dvds, so he preferred watching something new at the television rather than an old dvd.”

<sup>52</sup> “That’s the normality: when I speak him Italian, he answers me back in Italian, when I spoke to him English, he replies in English. Sometimes he starts speaking English spontaneously, but he never speaks English with those relatives who don’t.”

<sup>53</sup> “ I think that my daughter considers normal speaking two languages, she repeats the new words she learns in English and she seems curious about this language.”

<sup>54</sup> “At the beginning (there was a feeling of) refusal, now she is very positive”.

<sup>55</sup> “He oddly looks at me”

<sup>56</sup> “As her sister, she has never had feelings of refusal, because speaking two languages at home is normal. Differently from her sister, playing in English hinders her and she mixes the two languages as in a cauldron”.

These last comments, in particular, introduce the following questions about episodes of disappointment, refusal or confusion. It may, indeed, happen that some children cannot easily understand a language, and in this case they may feel frustrated or angry, or again, some of them present episodes of refusal. Considering that in the case of linguistic refusal there are multiple factors to consider, I asked parents whether they have ever experienced such phenomena with their children. 87% of children do not present episodes of frustration or disappointment when they cannot express it in a language; while 13% sometimes have these feelings. Considering refusal, instead, 77% never experienced a linguistic refusal, while 18% answered that, sometimes, their children refused to speak a language and 6% answered that their children often refuse to speak the second language. 72% never faced episodes of confusion; while 19% rarely experienced confusion and 9% often have episodes of confusion. As a consequence, I asked parents what did they do in order to help their children. One mother claimed that, at the moment, she has not succeeded in solving this situation; some mothers affirmed that these phenomena need time and patience to be solved, while another said that she used to repeat the correct sentence more than once. Some mothers added that:

*“Diversamente dalla sorella, non mischia le strutture ma solo le parole. Dimostra quindi un'impronta più italiana, pur essendo stata esposta più precocemente alla L2. Ovviamente, pur essendo sorelle molto vicine di età, l'influenza della sorella che parla in L1 ha un grosso peso. Inoltre, se per la prima sorella il tempo insieme era esclusivo, non è stato ovviamente lo stesso per lei.”<sup>57</sup>*

*“Episodi di confusione: a volte utilizza la struttura grammaticale inglese. “La rossa giacca” oppure “il nonno Guido cappello” Non intervengo correggendolo direttamente, ma ripetendo la frase in modo corretto.”<sup>58</sup>*

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<sup>57</sup> “Differently from her sister, she does not mix the language structures but just the words. In this way she shows a more Italian mark, even if she has been exposed to the L2 more prematurely than her sister. Obviously, having a sister who speaks L1 has a remarkable influence. Furthermore, if I spent a lot of time speaking L2 with the elder sister, the time I spent speaking L2 with her has been less.”

<sup>58</sup> “Episodes of confusion: sometimes she uses the English grammatical structure. “The red jacket” or “The grandpa Guido’s hat”. In those cases I do not step in correcting her directly, but I reformulate the sentence in a correct way”.

In the group there are several comments of mothers facing these experiences, indeed, the Facebook group is useful for sharing such experiences and finding advice and ideas to figure out a solution or a methodology that may help the child.

The last questions of the questionnaire are all addressed to the parents. In particular, concerning that the second language spoken to the child is not the native language of the parent, it is possible that, parents may have difficulties in expressing feelings or they may not always be able to express everything they want to communicate. The answers are very different depending on the parent's aptitude, personality and needs.

Some answered that they have never had difficulty in expressing it with their child. Others state that there are some moments, in particular when they go out with other families, friends or relatives, where they have difficulty in speaking a second language; they feel observed and sometimes criticised.

For example:

*"Trovo difficile esprimermi con il mio bambino nella seconda lingua Quando sono in positivo che negativo)"*<sup>59</sup>

*"Di fronte ad estranei, tipo in situazioni al parco o al supermercato, mi sento osservata..."*<sup>60</sup>

For other parents, instead, there are some moments where speaking a second language to their children is very complicated, in particular, when they need to express some feelings:

*"Sì, un'occasione difficile è ad esempio, quando siamo nervosi"*<sup>61</sup>

*"In momenti di pericolo o massima attenzione"*<sup>62</sup>

*"Quando sono tanto arrabbiata o quando si sente male di notte (è capitato 1/2)"*<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "I find it difficult to express with my child in the L2, both when I am in the good mood and when I am in the bad mood".

<sup>60</sup> "(when we are) in front of strangers, such as at the park or at the supermarket: in these situations I feel observed."

<sup>61</sup> "Yes, one difficult occasion is when we feel nervous ."

<sup>62</sup> "In moments of danger or great attention"

<sup>63</sup> "When I am very angry or when he does not feel well during the night-time (It happened once or twice).

*“Sì, quando devo calmare un capriccio, quando voglio confortarlo e più in generale quando ho bisogno di sentirmi "più vicina" a lui e viceversa.”<sup>64</sup>*

Actually, those parents who learnt a second language at school report a lack in an appropriate vocabulary to use everyday with their children. Indeed, the request for appropriate vocabulary for children is very common between the mothers who share this experience and in some groups and forums some mothers published files with the most common words and terminology to use in everyday life with children.

Finally I investigated the level of satisfaction with the experience and all the mothers are fully satisfied. Furthermore, they added that they will continue speaking a second language to their children, but also they will always improve their level in order to offer their children the best opportunity and the best input.

The last question concerned the Italian situation regarding bilingualism and second language acquisition programs for children. All mothers thought that more should be done in order to promote and improve a bilingual education, through language courses, activities; but, above all, Italian schools should improve the amount of time dedicated to the second language:

*“Il bilinguismo non è per niente sostenuto. Bisognerebbe introdurre l'inglese veicolare in tutte le scuole pubbliche, iniziare a promuovere la visione di film in lingua originale, nonché i playgroup ecc.”<sup>65</sup>*

*“Sarebbe auspicabile. Nella scuola italiana, per quella che è la mia esperienza, la SL è un qualcosa di lontanissimo. Il mio grande in seconda elementare in classe ha inglese una volta al mese, sempre che non debbano recuperare qualche cosa di italiano o matematica.”<sup>66</sup>*

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<sup>64</sup> “When I have to calm down vagaries, when I comfort him or when I need to feel closest to him and vice versa”

<sup>65</sup> “Bilingualism is not supported at all. English should be introduced as a vehicular language in all the Italian public schools and it should be promoted the vision of films in original language, but also playgroups etc.”

<sup>66</sup> “It would be desirable. Concerning my experience, in the Italian school, the second language is something very far (from the widespread mentality). My eldest son attends the second grade of the elementary school and he has English lessons once a month, when these lessons are not replaced by Italian or Maths lessons.”

Some parents complained about a lack in services that promote second language acquisition; furthermore most times, these services are too expensive for some families, as we can see in these examples:

*“Sicuramente in Italia scarseggiano le opportunità, soprattutto in ambito scolastico. I corsi extra sono tutti molto cari, e chi non conosce bene una lingua o non può permetterselo, deve rinunciare a dare ai figli un'educazione bilingue. Organizzerei sicuramente molti più gruppi di gioco e momenti di ritrovo tra bambini.”<sup>67</sup>*

*“L'Italia è molto arretrata sotto questo punto di vista e ciò che offre è troppo caro e per pochi (corsi...). Si Dovrebbero organizzare più momenti di ritrovo e gioco tra bimbi in lingua”.<sup>68</sup>*

For this reason, almost 100% of parents consider that the Italian school should do more to enhance the acquisition of a second language through the establishment of subjects in the second language, or the help of native speakers and the systematic introduction of the second language from the first year of kindergarten.

### 5.3.6 Conclusion

The data collected show that this experience has a positive trend. As already mentioned, the parents are fully satisfied with this experience and they will continue this challenge in the future: this means that children positively respond to these stimuli. As several parents claimed, their children make progress as they continue the exposure of a second language; however, this task is hard to fulfil and needs preparation, perseverance and the organisation of both parents.

From the data collected, English is the second language chosen by the majority of the parents, and those parents who chose another language may have difficulty in

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<sup>67</sup> “In Italy these opportunities are very scarce, especially in school. Extra courses are very expensive and those parents who cannot speak a language very well or afford (these language courses) must renounce a bilingual education for their children. I would organise more playgroups and meetings where children can speak a second language.”

<sup>68</sup> “From this point of view, Italy is very backward and what it offers is too expensive and only for few people (language courses...). I would organise more meetings in the second language and more playgroups for children.”

finding material or people with whom to share their troubles in order to receive some advice. Indeed, the experience and advice of those parents who already encountered some of the most common problems in upbringing children bilingually may help other parents to improve the way to perform their bilingual experience.

Through the questionnaire, I noticed that the majority of the mothers are fully prepared to speak a second language at home; even if they are aware of the fact that the language they learnt in school is quite different from the language used in everyday life and activities. I also noticed that some mothers' experiences are supported by a method called Hocus and Lotus: it is an educative linguistic program created to facilitate language acquisition in children. This method is found in several European countries and, recently, has spread in Italy. There are mothers who enrolled their children in extra-scholastic courses held by teachers that follow this method; furthermore there are also kindergartens and elementary schools that can adopt this method for their classes.

To conclude, this questionnaire has demonstrated that raising a bilingual child is a possible and positive choice for children because the majority considers speaking two languages at home as a normal fact in their daily routine and they normally use these two languages in their everyday life. Surely, this path is not simple and requires a lot of time but the parental satisfaction and the children's positive reactions show that it is worthwhile.

## 5.5 Approach to the bilingual upbringing

After the initial analysis of the answers, I also focused on the methods used by parents. Collecting data from the questionnaire, indeed, I noticed that each mother has her own method to communicate in a second language with her child. Methodology is fundamental to transmit the non-native language to a child, and it is often responsible for the success or the failure of this experience. For this reason, I thought about a collection of the most used methods that may be helpful for those parents who wish to embark upon this experience.



One of the most important things expressed by some parents is planning the type of bilingual education that a family wants to provide for their child, especially before the child's birth. A bilingual upbringing must not be improvised, but it needs information and preparation: there are several books, blog and forum that should help in finding a strategy or that could dispel any initial doubts.

As already mentioned, the earlier a parent starts speaking a second language the better it is for the child's exposure. Indeed, children in the womb are able to discriminate sounds of different languages and once born they are able to recognise the same sounds; for this reason, mom-child chats are broadly encouraged since pregnancy.

According to the questionnaire and to some experiences, the most used methods are: OPOL, Time and Place and ML@H (this last method is not used by the parents that filled in the questionnaire). These methods have both advantages and disadvantages: the OPOL method, for example, is useful because the child is always highly exposed to both languages, however it requires a great proficiency of the second language. Time and Place is convenient because children match some activities to a language and other activities to the other, so to have a clear distinction in their minds; however using this system may lead to the child knowing only one language to express that activity and to the development of a poor vocabulary in each language. In this case, the parents should be careful to help the child in developing the same vocabulary for each language in order to express in both languages concerning every activity done. ML@H (Minority Language at Home) is an effort for the entire family who should adopt that second language as main language of the house, but also in this case the amount of exposure is high.

One of the most incisive methods is with the help of materials such as: books, nursery rhymes, songs, dvds and cartoons, and bilingual toys. There are several tools that may help in the acquisition of a language: recently, indeed, some Italian toys enterprises have introduced some bilingual toys for toddlers and children. In the questionnaire, one mother explained an unusual method she used to introduce the second language to her child:

*“Con lo stratagemma della "maglietta magica" ogni giorno (o appena posso) vivo con mia figlia una routine in inglese dedicata alle storie di Hocus e Lotus. Quando indosso la maglietta la lingua di comunicazione è l'inglese, quando la tolgo l'italiano. Essendo mia figlia cresciuta sin da piccola con questo gioco, accetta benissimo il cambio di lingua anche se ora a 7 anni sa che la magia non c'entra.”<sup>69</sup>*

This method may be adopted also by using a doll or a teddy bear that speaks only the second language: in this way, if children want to communicate with the toy, they have to speak that second language, otherwise the toy does not understand.

Considerable help comes from groups and playgroups in the second language: these opportunities, where children can play and use the second language, may enhance the level of exposure and enrich children's vocabulary. Furthermore, parents can evaluate the help of external people such as au-pair girls, nannies and second language teachers that may help the child to improve the accent and fluency. In addition, for teenagers there is the possibility of second language courses abroad, even if it is quite expensive. In the last decade, in Italy, there is also the creation of summer camps in a second language. All these factors may improve the child's bilingual upbringing, even if the most important factor is parents' motivation and availability in embarking upon this incredible experience.

## 5.6 Bilingual upbringing experiences in other countries

Up to now, the dissertation has focused on Italian families raising their children bilingually; however, in other parts of the world, there are some non-native families who are experiencing the same bilingual upbringing.

As mentioned before, the Internet is an excellent source of information: I found some parents who, through their blogs, shared their stories, methods and progress with a

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<sup>69</sup> “(I introduced the second language) thanks to the ploy of the “magic T-shirt”: everyday (or when I can), I live with my daughter an English routine based on the Hocus and Lotus ‘stories. When I wear the magic T-shirt the communication language is English, when I take it off, the conversation turns into Italian. Considering that my daughter is grown up with this game, she accepts the language shifting at home, even if, now that she is 7, she perfectly knows that the T-shirt isn't magic at all.”

worldwide audience. I also looked for other experiences in order to have some feedback from those families who applied this bilingual education in the past. The discovery of several stories has been unforeseen and surprising, especially because each family has its own story made of success but also failure. The first parent I met was Bernd Klein, a German professor, who decided to raise their two children in English. In March, I had the opportunity to organise a Skype interview with him, in order to ask him directly how he managed this bilingual upbringing. He and his wife, indeed, are German native speakers and they live in Germany. Through the interview I discovered that they started this experience in 1992 thanks to the example of American-German friends and the reading of an Australian writer's book, who also experienced a non-native bilingual upbringing in 50's. The method they used was the OPOL approach: he spoke English while his wife spoke German to the children. He adds that he had no contact with English native speakers, so the only support he had was books, video films and audiocassettes. In his blog, but also in the Skype interview we did, he claimed that initially he met numbers of obstacles: he felt embarrassed and had a feeling that he was doing something abnormal. These feelings were increased by the criticism of his friends and relatives who claimed that he might interfere with his kids' linguistic development. Furthermore, because of his work, he could not spend so much time with his children and he sustained that this attitude has influenced their English level, because, during the daytime, they were more exposed to German than English. Some of these obstacles vanished with time; indeed, the first feelings of doing something inappropriate were replaced with excitement along with his children's progress. His children, indeed, responded to the English language in a good way, especially the daughter who was enthusiastic. After 9 years of OPOL his children were passive bilinguals: they could perfectly understand and read in English, indeed, they only read English books. His daughter in particular was very advanced compared to her classmates: she read very complicated English books and her writing skills were very advanced. Bernd recognised that their English would be much better if they had an English context around them (playgroups or other children

with whom speaking English). He then stopped using the OPOL method in 2002 because of his son's school problems, however, these problems were not related to their bilingual upbringing: he just found it appropriate to suspend the OPOL experience in order to help his son in that delicate moment. His daughter, however, continued her exposure to the second language through books, films and a year spent abroad. At the end of the interview, he told me how satisfied he was for having made this choice in the past, and he encouraged all those parents who want to embark upon such adventure. Indeed, in all these years he received a lot of e-mails and letters from parents in need of advice and support.

Another interesting story is that of Nina: she lives in the US with her 8 children and she and her husband are bringing up their children bilingually speaking German at home, even if they are non-native speakers. They started this experience almost 20 years ago. When Nina was a child, she lived in Germany for five years and then she went back to US where she graduated in German Teaching and Language Acquisition. Given that her husband also speaks German, they tried to speak German to their first son. Unlike Bernd, they adopted the ML@H method: they only spoke German to the child, while she and her husband communicated in English to each other. The result is that their son's first word was in German. In her blog she tells the bilingual story of her family: two years after the first son's birth, they had twin girls, two years later another boy and after two years another girl. All of them are raised speaking German at home; however, when they started Elementary school, they started speaking English also at home. For this reason, Nina thought about keeping up many of their German routines. After nine years they had another baby and a year later two twins. She affirms that all her children decided to speak only German at home with each other and with their littlest siblings. She also explains the method they planned and that they are still using: she and her husband always speak to the children in German, they also are supported by German books, films, lullabies, songs and technology; furthermore their daily routine is in German. She also reports her 19 years old daughter's perception on growing up bilingually:

“Overall the impact of growing up German has been wonderful. I have found that my understanding of culture and language has grown immensely. I am not afraid to be different and I love learning about different cultures and I think my background has helped me appreciate different ways of thinking. I would conclude by saying that speaking German was not a hindrance to my education but rather an open door to new and fresh perspectives.”<sup>70</sup>

Through the Internet I also found other families who are raising a child bilingually even if they are non-native speakers: this is the story of Kristine’s family who live in the Us. Like Nina, they also have 8 children, however this family speaks French at home and English at school. In her blog she says that the French level of her children varies depending on the child: the older the better. They also adopted the ML@H approach speaking full-time French, except when they are with other people.

A similar story is that of Renee, who is bringing up her three children in French even if they live in California. Despite the success of her children who speak a perfect English and a fluent French, in her blog she published some notes written almost 20 years ago where she expressed doubts and fears concerning this project that she was performing with her children:

“When Jeremie first starting talking using one word sentences, he used a few in English and a few in French. I was a little discouraged because it seemed a bad sign to me that although he did use the French word for "ball" he also used the English words "hi" and "bye.”

This situation changed when:

“Jeremie’s language started to develop beyond just a few words. It soon became clear that he not only used more French words than English in his own speech, but also understood much more in French than he did in English.”<sup>71</sup>

On the web I also found other inspiring examples of families raising children in German: such as Tamara with her 6 years old Kaya. She always speaks German

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<sup>70</sup> Based on Nina’s blog: Bringing up 8 bilingual babies, bilingual parenting in a non-native language, available on: <http://nonnativebilingualparents.blogspot.it/p/growingup-german-j-so-my-motherasked-me.html> (last visited 07/05/15)

<sup>71</sup> Based on Renee’s blog: The Johnson’s family bilingual adventure available at: <http://bilingualjohnsons.blogspot.it/2014/01/our-bilingual-story.html#comment-form> (last visited 07/05/15)

to her, while her husband speaks English. She claims that, despite the initial doubts and difficulties she has no regret for having such experience. There are also some mothers who are raising their children in French, while they are English native speakers; and also some families who speak Spanish at home with fruitful results.

In their blog there is the story of their bilingual path, from the child's birth up to present (even if in some cases the blog is interrupted). All their blogs are rich in advice, methods and material to use; furthermore, some parents also report the progress of their children writing the words they learn day by day in both languages.

As one can notice, all these people's stories have different origins, different motivations and different results, however, they all have in common the passion for foreign languages and the wish to provide their children the benefit of bilingualism.



## CONCLUSION

Recently, several studies have focused on the benefits of growing up speaking two or more languages. Bilingualism, indeed, not only has advantages on the mental development of the child and on socio-cultural aspects; but it also prevents the development of aging mental diseases.

In the world, there are people who grow up speaking two or more languages because of different factors, such as immigration and bilingual families or bilingual education. In the past, this possibility seemed to be a privilege only for those families who lived in a country different from that of their origin, or composed of parents who are native speakers of two different languages. However, this trend is changing: recently, there are a lot of non-native families who master a second language and try to educate their children bilingually. As we have seen in the last two chapters, this dissertation deals with the analysis of two different approaches that Italian families can choose in order to raise their children bilingually.

The first approach is the choice to send children to a school where English is the vehicular language (The English International School of Padua) and the second is The Second Language at Home Approach. While in the former the bilingual education is reached through the school system that provides an immersion program in English; in the latter, children grow up speaking two languages thanks to the effort and enthusiasm of their parents. This research has been possible thanks to the opportunity I had to observe for three weeks the children' daily routine for three weeks, and thanks to a group of mothers who shared their Second Language at Home Approach experiences. Both of these experiences have the common goal to reach a second language proficiency but through different ways. However, after having observed the children at the EISP and after having analysed the questionnaire filled by some mothers, I can conclude that both of these approaches appear to accomplish the aim of bringing up a child bilingually. Surely, in each case there are some factors



that may facilitate or prevent the second language acquisition; however, it depends in particular on the quality of the input the children are exposed to. Furthermore, each child is different and has different reactions to the second language exposition, indeed, there are children who will benefit more and others who are slower in their acquisition. Concerning the EISP children, they indeed have the opportunity to become bilingual, reaching proficiency in high school. Concerning the Second Language at Home Approach, the quality of input plays a fundamental role and this approach requires efforts, perseverance, organisation and passion. For this reason, I chose to dedicate a section also to those parents who, in the past, already embarked upon this adventure. Nina and Bernd's experiences in fact are useful to provide some feedback for those parents who have only just started bringing up their children bilingually and may be feeling lost or discouraged.

The analysis of these two approaches has been stimulating but at the same time it has been prevented by one particular obstacle, that is the lack of literature. I have been unable to find references to research conducted on the same topic, so I had to look for samples and people that are experiencing a non-native bilingual approach all around the world. However, thanks to this study I had the opportunity to get in touch with several people who really believe in this type of bilingual education, and I learnt about their stories, their methods, doubts and success. At any rate, none of parents regrets the choice they made but, actually, they are stimulated to continue in the future.

In light of these observations, and considering that there are several parents who are experiencing a non-native bilingual upbringing, I firmly believe that this subject might be topic of interest for a future research.

This dissertation provides a general overview on an increasing trend and phenomenon and it would need further and more detailed research. For this reason, a future approach might study these experiences more in detail, perhaps establishing boundaries on particular aspects that need to be studied such as the quality of input, or the development of a non-native language depending on the age of children or on

episodes of refusal. Particular attention should be paid at the methods that each family adopts: this research, indeed, has revealed different approaches: from the non-native OPOL method to homeschooling.

The result of this analysis is the symptom of an increasing trend that takes place not only in Italy, but also in the rest of the world and that is likely to augment even more in future. Indeed, the undeniable importance of knowing foreign languages brings a rising wish to learn and speak more than one language. Bilingualism and multilingualism are seen as beneficial qualities and those people who can speak more than one language are considered as socially advantaged. The children of today, indeed, have to be educated to be citizens of a world always in change; and in this mutable world, languages fulfil an important status: they are the guiding lights of this change.

However, there is still a lot of work to do in order to promote bilingualism and a bilingual education. This work is not only structural but also psychological: myths have to be dispelled and recently this is happening in quite a fast way thanks to scientific studies that are dismantling several common believes; research has to be promoted in order to list all the undeniable benefits that bilingualism involves; creating and providing the opportunity for all families for access to a bilingual education.

From this point of view, Italy is still behind compared to some European countries especially concerning languages in the Italian school system. For this reason, the bilingual approach, that several parents are experiencing with their children, is commendable and forward-looking compared to the current Italian situation.

To conclude, this dissertation brought to light a phenomenon that involves an increasing number of families, not only in Italy, but in the entire world; and considering the fact that languages are the skeleton key of progress in this globalized world, I hope that this study might inspire a future research.

Through this thesis, I wish to give voice to a world made of families with different stories, origins and traditions but with the same laudable wish to give their children the gift of bilingualism.

## Appendix A: The questionnaire

### Questionario per genitori italiani che parlano una seconda lingua in casa

Gentili Genitori,  
sono Sara Moda, laureanda in Lingue Moderne per la Comunicazione e la Cooperazione Internazionale presso l'Università degli Studi di Padova. Vi chiedo la gentilezza di compilare questo questionario che sarà utile ai fini della mia tesi di laurea sull'esperienza di crescere un bambino bilingue in Italia. Il questionario si rivolge esclusivamente a genitori italiani che vivono in Italia e che hanno scelto di parlare una seconda lingua al proprio bambino. Nel caso in cui abbiate più di un figlio sarebbe opportuno riempire tanti questionari quanti sono i figli, in quanto ogni bimbo reagisce diversamente agli stimoli proposti. Nel questionario incontrerete diverse tipologie di domanda: a risposta aperta, a risposta multipla con la scelta di una sola opzione oppure con la scelta di più opzioni.

Vi ringrazio infinitamente per l'aiuto e il tempo dedicatomi.

#### 1. Background

Il genitore che risponde al questionario è

*Contrassegna solo un ovale*

La mamma

Il papà

2. Qual è l'età del tuo bambino?

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3. Qual è la lingua in cui parli al tuo bambino?  
(oltre che l'italiano)

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4. Quando hai iniziato a parlargli in quella seconda lingua?

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5. In che modo hai appreso questa seconda lingua?

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6. Come valuti il tuo livello di questa seconda lingua?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Elementare
- Intermedio
- Avanzato
- Quasi madrelingua

## **Primi Passi**

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7. Quando e in che modo hai/avete deciso di intraprendere questa esperienza?

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8. Come ti sei/vi siete organizzati?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Il papà usa l'italiano, la mamma la seconda lingua;
- Il papà e la mamma usano entrambe le lingue.

- La mamma usa l'italiano e il papà la seconda lingua
- Il papà e la mamma usano l'italiano e uno dei due parla in certi momenti della giornata al proprio bimbo usando la seconda lingua
- Altro

9. Specifica

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10. Quanti mesi aveva il tuo bambino quando ha detto la prima parola? In che lingua era?  
( se la ricordi puoi scriverla)

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11. Quando pensi agli altri bambini della sua età, pensi che il tuo bambino sia diverso per quanto riguarda il momento in cui ha iniziato a usare il linguaggio?  
*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Per nulla
- Un po'
- Abbastanza
- Del tutto

**Domande sul genitore**

12. Quanto tempo durante la giornata ti rivolgi al tuo bambino in italiano?

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13. E quanto nella seconda lingua?

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14. Che lingua parli più spesso con le altre persone in casa?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

maggiormente italiano

maggiormente la seconda lingua

15. Sei a casa tutto il giorno con il tuo/ i tuoi bambino/i?  
(bambini al di sotto dei 3 anni)

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

sì

no

16. Se la risposta è no, durante i giorni lavorativi il vostro bambino rimane con persone che parlano italiano?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

sì

no

### **Domande su familiari/ altre persone**

17. Se la risposta precedente è no, che lingua parla la persona che si occupa del vostro bambino in vostra assenza?

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18. Che lingua parla il vostro bambino con i familiari/ persone più strette?

(ML= madre lingua SL= seconda lingua)

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- SL sempre ML mai
- SL raramente ML spesso
- SL 50% ML 50%
- SL spesso ML raramente
- SL quasi sempre ML mai

### Domande sul bambino

19. Che tipo di scuola/ classe frequenta il tuo bambino?

(scrivi per favore se si tratta di una scuola italiana, internazionale o che segue programmi linguistici particolari)

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20. Quanta esposizione alla seconda lingua riceve il tuo bambino ogni giorno?

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- Meno di un'ora
- Da una a tre ore
- Da tre ore a mezza giornata
- Tutta la giornata



**21. Che attività fa il tuo bambino durante la settimana usando l'italiano?**

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

	Ogni giorno	Almeno una volta a settimana	Quasi mai/mai
Leggere libri			
usare tablet o computer			
Guardare cartoni animati e dvd			
Raccontare storie			
Cantare canzoni			
Giocare			
Altro			

**22. Specifica** (se tra le opzioni hai messo altro)

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**23. Che attività fa il tuo bambino durante la settimana usando la sua seconda lingua?**

*Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.*

	Ogni giorno	Almeno una volta a settimana	Quasi mai/mai
Leggere libri			
usare tablet o computer			
Guardare cartoni animati e dvd			
Raccontare storie			
Cantare canzoni			
Giocare			
Altro			

24. Specifica (se tra le opzioni hai scelto altro)

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25. Il tuo bambino frequenta attività extra-scolastiche? Quanto spesso, e in che lingua?

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26. Il tuo bambino è figlio unico?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- sì  
 no

27. Se il tuo bambino non è figlio unico, che lingua parla con il suo/i suoi fratelli/ sorelle?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- SL mai ML sempre  
 SL raramente ML spesso  
 SL 50% ML 50%  
 SL spesso ML raramente  
 SL quasi sempre ML quasi mai

28. Che lingua parla il tuo bambino con i suoi amici?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- SL mai ML sempre  
 SL raramente ML spesso

- SL 50% ML 50%
- SL spesso ML raramente
- SL quasi sempre ML quasi mai

## Comportamento nei confronti delle due lingue

29. Quale lingua parla più volentieri il tuo bambino?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- L'italiano
- La seconda lingua

30. Come si comporta il tuo bambino nei confronti delle due lingue che vengono parlate a casa?

*(per lui/lei è la normalità, si sente in imbarazzo, accetta di buon grado che si parlino due lingue...)*

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31. Quando non riesce ad esprimersi nella sua seconda lingua, il tuo bambino appare deluso/ frustrato/ arrabbiato?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Per nulla
- Qualche volta
- Spesso
- Frequentemente

32. Il tuo bambino ha mai dimostrato episodi di rifiuto nei confronti della seconda lingua?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Mai
- Raramente
- Spesso

33. Ed episodi di confusione?

*Contrassegna solo un ovale.*

- Mai
- Raramente
- Spesso

34. Sei riuscita a risolvere questa situazione? In che modo?

*Nel caso in cui tu abbia risposto affermativamente alle ultime due domande.*

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35. Ci sono occasioni in cui trovi difficile esprimerti con il tuo bambino in una seconda lingua?

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36. Ti senti soddisfatta di questa esperienza?

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37. Pensi che continuerai in futuro ad utilizzare questo metodo?

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38. Pensi che in Italia debbano esserci più opportunità che promuovano un'educazione bilingue? Come potrebbero essere migliorate le opportunità già esistenti?

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## ANALISI DI DUE METODI SCELTI DA FAMIGLIE ITALIANE PER CRESCERE BAMBINI BILINGUI IN ITALIA

Dare una definizione di bilinguismo può inizialmente sembrare semplice: una persona bilingue è colei in grado di parlare fluentemente due lingue. Tuttavia, se si cerca di indagare più approfonditamente questo fenomeno, ci si rende conto che comprendere il bilinguismo porta ad una dimensione molto più ampia e sfaccettata che coinvolge numerosi campi e discipline che spaziano dalla linguistica alla psicologia; e verso la quale sono state indirizzate teorie sociali ed antropologiche, ricerche e studi iniziati nel passato e che continuano nel presente. I vari studiosi che si sono interfacciati con questo tipo di indagine hanno sempre cercato di fornire una propria definizione di bilinguismo spaziando dal completo controllo di due lingue, alla minima padronanza in una delle quattro competenze del linguaggio: parlare, ascoltare, comprendere e scrivere. Tra questi due estremi si trovano numerose definizioni e correnti di pensiero. Una definizione accreditata considera il bilinguismo come uno stato psicologico e sociale di individui o gruppi di persone che risulta da interazioni che avvengono tramite linguaggio in cui vengono usati due o più codici linguistici (inclusi i dialetti).

Il bilinguismo, inoltre, può essere classificato in diverse tipologie secondo criteri diversi: bilinguismo individuale (che comprende sottogruppi quali il bilinguismo bilanciato e dominante, semilinguismo, bilinguismo composito e coordinato, ricettivo e produttivo) e bilinguismo sociale (bilinguismo esogeno ed endogeno, additivo e sottrattivo, elitario e popolare). Un altro criterio di individuazione di tipologie di bilinguismo è l'età: il bilinguismo quindi si dividerà in bilinguismo infantile (che può essere di tipo precoce simultaneo o consecutivo per bambini fino a sei anni) e bilinguismo tardivo ovvero che si sviluppa a partire da un'età superiore ai sei anni. Il fattore dell'età legato al bilinguismo ha sempre generato un interesse

particolare, non solo in quanto tipicizza il bilinguismo, ma anche perché è uno dei fattori che maggiormente influenza l'apprendimento di una lingua, soprattutto per quanto riguarda la convinzione che i bambini acquisiscano due o più lingue in modo molto più rapido ed efficiente rispetto agli adulti. Il cervello del bambino nei primi anni di vita è dotato di una straordinaria neuro-plasticità, inoltre sempre nei primi anni le sinapsi vengono costruite e fortificate. Si viene quindi a delineare l'Ipotesi del Periodo Critico, teorizzata da Lennenberg, secondo la quale dopo l'infanzia, nel periodo che coincide circa con la pubertà, la capacità di apprendimento di una seconda lingua subisce un arresto che non permette di raggiungere livelli pari a quelli di un madrelingua. Anche se questa teoria ha raccolto numerosi consensi, oggi è stata per lo più abbandonata o confutata: è stato provato che adulti o adolescenti che apprendono una seconda lingua dopo il presunto periodo critico riescono lo stesso a raggiungere livelli di lingua simili a quelli di un madrelingua, grazie a fattori determinanti quali motivazione e necessità. Un altro fattore determinante per l'apprendimento di una lingua è la qualità di input a cui un bilingue viene sottoposto: più input un bambino riceve nelle lingue di apprendimento, più apprenderà in modo corretto e sistematico.

Quando si parla di bilinguismo, spesso si parla anche di fenomeni linguistici molto comuni correlati ad esso e tra questi vi sono: adattamento del discorso, alternanza dei codici, interferenza e mescolanza tra codici.

Nonostante molti libri ed articoli siano stati scritti sul bilinguismo; questo fenomeno è stato affiancato, soprattutto in passato, da miti frutto di credenze popolari più o meno diffuse, ma sufficienti a generare sentimenti di diffidenza nelle comunità e tra le famiglie che decidono di crescere un bambino in modo bilingue. La credenza più diffusa considera il bilinguismo un fenomeno raro: in realtà studiosi e linguisti affermano che più della metà della popolazione mondiale parli più di una lingua (o dialetto) quotidianamente. Un altro mito molto diffuso crede che un bambino che cresca parlando più di una lingua possa confondersi tra le due, oppure che il bilinguismo sia causa di balbuzie. Tutte questi miti sono stati confutati da studi e

ricerche che hanno portato alla luce i numerosi vantaggi dell'essere bilingue; in particolare, negli ultimi anni si sta radicando l'idea che i bilingui siano più intelligenti dei monolingui grazie agli effetti positivi che il bilinguismo produce sul cervello: è stato studiato che parlare più di una lingua non solo migliora le abilità cognitive, ma funge anche da scudo contro malattie mentali in tarda età.

Il bilinguismo viene inoltre associato spesso al concetto di seconda lingua (L2) ; tuttavia, mentre in alcuni casi queste due parole si riferiscono allo stesso concetto, in altri casi vengono considerati come due fenomeni distinti ma in relazione tra loro.

Per seconda lingua in genere si riferisce ad una lingua acquisita nell'ambiente dove viene effettivamente parlata. Correlata alla nozione di seconda lingua vi è la nozione di parlante considerato l'attore principale nello sviluppo linguistico. Si distinguono diversi tipi di parlanti: il parlante nativo (*native speaker*), il parlante quasi nativo (*near-native speaker*), l'*heritage language speaker* ovvero parlante come seconda lingua una lingua considerata minoritaria, e il bilingue. Per quanto riguarda l'apprendimento di una seconda lingua, l'essere umano ha una capacità innata di acquisire il linguaggio e lo apprende tramite stadi che sono considerati universali. Ciò grazie ad una capacità biologica innata all'apprendimento che include principi linguistici fondamentali per l'acquisizione: tali principi sono anche chiamati "Grammatica Universale" teorizzata da Chomsky e consiste nella capacità di apprendere il linguaggio nonostante un numero insufficiente di input. Tutto questo sarebbe possibile grazie a questa grammatica intrinseca che è dentro ogni individuo e che da accesso ad una conoscenza grammaticale innata che aiuta il bambino a sviluppare un sistema linguistico completo. Anche il processo di acquisizione di L2 avviene tramite stadi che sono risultati essere universali. Nell'acquisizione di una seconda lingua un ruolo importante è rivestito dalla lingua madre del parlante (L1) fondamentale per stabilire una correlazione con la seconda lingua in modo da comprenderne le similarità o le differenze. Tuttavia può accadere che un bambino nell'apprendere una seconda lingua dopo averne appresa una prima incorra in un fenomeno linguistico chiamato inter-linguaggio, ovvero un sistema linguistico



situato tra la lingua madre e la seconda lingua da apprendere. Una figura particolare di inter-linguaggio è la fossilizzazione cioè una sorta di effetto plateau che si verifica durante l'apprendimento di una seconda lingua e che sfocia nell'inter-linguaggio.

Nell'apprendimento della seconda lingua si fa una distinzione tra acquisizione incidentale e intenzionale: la prima chiamata "acquisizione", la seconda "apprendimento". Tuttavia, mentre quest'ultimo si sviluppa a partire da interferenze contestuali e strategie mnemoniche combinate con una metodologia di apprendimento, il primo è azionato da fattori che i linguisti chiamano input e output. Gli input sono dati linguistici di una determinata lingua ai quali un parlante è esposto e rappresentano la parte più importante del processo di apprendimento perché più gli input sono frequenti, maggiore sarà la probabilità di successo nello sviluppare quella determinata lingua. Per output, invece, si intende il punto di arrivo del processo di apprendimento del linguaggio e consiste in una reazione verbale ad una comunicazione verbale (input). Essi sono fondamentali per capire se il processo di apprendimento è avvenuto con successo o meno. L'apprendimento di una seconda lingua non è influenzato solamente da input e output ma anche da fattori socio-psicologici e individuali tra i quali identità, comportamento e affettività.

Parlando di bilinguismo non si può non parlare anche di educazione bilingue. In molte società, infatti, l'acquisizione di competenze in due o più lingue assume un significato considerevole da un punto di vista socio-culturale ed economico. Oggigiorno si sente sempre più il bisogno di apprendere più di una lingua e ciò a causa della crescente globalizzazione, dell'apertura dei mercati ma anche di un crescente fenomeno migratorio. Ecco quindi che il bisogno dell'apprendimento di più lingue sfocia nella richiesta di un tipo di educazione che possa rispondere a questi requisiti, cioè un'educazione bilingue.

L'educazione bilingue di un bambino in un paese monolingue richiede un continuo sforzo e sacrificio da parte dei genitori non solamente all'inizio ma per tutto il periodo dell'educazione. Fortunatamente esistono numerose opportunità e soluzioni che possono essere adottate sia all'interno della famiglia che all'esterno,

specialmente in quei casi in cui la famiglia decide (o è costretta) di crescere i propri figli in modo bilingue. In genere, con educazione bilingue si intende una varietà di programmi educazionali che coinvolgono due o più lingue. Questa definizione vede implicato l'uso di due lingue come principale mezzo di istruzione; tuttavia, non vengono considerati come educazione bilingue quei curricula che includono una seconda lingua insegnata come materia scolastica fine a sé stessa, senza avere nessun'altro ruolo in attività accademiche.

In questa tesi sono state prese in considerazione due tipi di educazione bilingue: quella scolastica e quella domestica. Per quanto riguarda l'educazione bilingue scolastica, al mondo esistono diversi tipi di scuole e di programmi che impartiscono un'educazione bilingue: la scuola internazionale multilingue, programmi d'immersione (che si dividono in totale precoce, parziale precoce ed immersione tardiva), le *Heritage School*, e le *Dual Language School*. La scuola internazionale multilingue è nata con l'obiettivo di soddisfare i bisogni educativi di bambini i cui genitori lavorano in un paese diverso da quello di origine, o che sono costretti a viaggiare frequentemente. L'*Heritage School* è stata creata per preservare quelle lingue minoritarie o indigene che vengono parlate da un ristretto numero di persone, ad esempio la comunità ispanica negli Stati Uniti, mentre le *Dual Language schools* sono state create per permettere un bilanciato equilibrio tra la lingua maggioritaria e la lingua minoritaria.

Per quanto riguarda l'educazione bilingue domestica vi sono diverse modalità con cui raggiungere l'obiettivo di crescere un bambino bilingue. Due sono le metodologie più utilizzate nel panorama mondiale: OPOL (*One Parent One Language*) e ML@H (*Minority Language At Home*). OPOL è il metodo usato più frequentemente dalle famiglie che vogliono educare un bambino bilingue. Con questo metodo, generalmente, un genitore si rivolge al proprio bambino nella lingua maggioritaria, mentre l'altro genitore utilizza la lingua minoritaria in modo da garantirgli una quantità di input sufficiente a far sviluppare entrambe le lingue. Gli scenari che possono delinearsi sono molteplici: la famiglia può vivere sia nel paese

d'origine ed essere formata da due genitori di origini diverse, oppure in un paese straniero e i genitori hanno la stessa origine, oppure due genitori con la stessa origine vivono nel loro paese natio ma uno dei due padroneggia una seconda lingua e vuole parlarla al bambino.

Il secondo metodo più utilizzato nel panorama educativo domestico è il ML@H e consiste nell'adottare la lingua minoritaria come lingua ufficialmente parlata da tutta la famiglia nell'ambiente domestico, anche se non è la lingua madre dei genitori.

Dopo aver analizzato i vari tipi di educazione bilingue che possono essere presi in considerazione dalle famiglie, gli ultimi due capitoli si concentrano in un'analisi di due opportunità scelte dalle famiglie italiane per crescere i propri figli in modo bilingue. Queste due opportunità rispecchiano i due tipi di educazione bilingue, ovvero un metodo analizzato corrisponde all'educazione bilingue scolastica mentre l'altro corrisponde all'educazione bilingue impartita dai genitori.

Il primo metodo analizzato corrisponde al percorso scolastico dell'English International School di Padova, una scuola privata che accoglie bambini e ragazzi dai 18 mesi ai 18 anni fornendo loro un percorso educativo bilingue dal nido al liceo. Questa scuola ha attuato un *immersion program* nel quale i bambini vengono educati attraverso l'inglese come lingua veicolare. In questa scuola, in particolare, l'inglese viene utilizzato in quasi tutte le materie ad eccezione delle lingue e delle loro letterature, tra cui l'italiano.

All'inizio i bambini hanno un'esposizione alla lingua inglese pari al 100% del tempo trascorso a scuola, con l'andare degli anni questa percentuale si riduce in quanto inizia ad essere materia di studio anche l'italiano e altre lingue straniere (spagnolo e tedesco). La scuola è suddivisa in Asilo Nido, Scuola dell'Infanzia, Scuola Elementare, Scuola Media, Liceo; tuttavia, l'analisi di questa tesi si concentra esclusivamente su bambini frequentanti la Scuola Elementare. Lo scorso novembre, infatti, ho avuto modo di essere ospite nella scuola per tre settimane, durante le quali ho osservato il quotidiano svolgimento delle attività svolte dai bambini. Durante quel periodo ho avuto diversi ruoli a seconda delle classi e delle materie incontrate: in

alcune classi ho semplicemente osservato l'interazione tra bambini e maestre, in altre invece ho interagito direttamente con i bambini durante canzoni o seguendo piccoli gruppi durante le attività ed esercizi.

Nelle tre settimane trascorse non sono stata ospite di tutte le classi della Scuola Elementare ma solo di quelle che a parere delle insegnanti avrebbero potuto essere più interessanti per lo svolgimento della tesi. Alla luce di ciò, le classi osservate sono state *Reception* (che equivale all'ultimo anno di asilo e consiste in un anno di inserimento e passaggio dall' *Infant* all' *Elementary School*), *Year 1*, *Year 3* e *Year 5* (le classi prime, terze e quinte). Seguendo quest'ordine ho potuto verificare come la situazione linguistica avanza e migliora di anno in anno, ma anche come gli errori e imperfezioni più comuni cambiano e vengono risolte. Ho osservato le classi più volte sia durante le lezioni in inglese (lingua inglese, matematica, geografia, storia, educazione artistica, ginnastica, musica e scienze) sia durante le ore di lingua italiana.

L'osservazione fatta è stata utile per verificare come questo tipo di educazione bilingue avviene e, in particolare, se per una famiglia italiana sia possibile garantire al proprio figlio un'educazione in entrambe le lingue, e allo stesso tempo raggiungere l'obiettivo di crescere un bambino in grado di esprimersi correntemente in due idiomi. L'ultima parte della tesi coincide con l'altra opportunità che può essere scelta da una famiglia per permettere al proprio bambino di crescere bilingue, ovvero un'educazione bilingue tra le mura domestiche. Questo tipo di scelta viene fatta prevalentemente in tutte quelle famiglie composte da genitori di diversa nazionalità o da famiglie trasferitesi all'estero; tuttavia, vi è una minoranza di genitori che, nonostante siano italiani e vivano in Italia, hanno una buona, se non ottima, padronanza di una seconda lingua. La parte finale della mia tesi si concentra proprio nella scelta fatta da questa minoranza di genitori di parlare quotidianamente ai propri bambini non solo nella loro lingua madre ma anche nella seconda lingua che ben padroneggiano.

La realizzazione di quest'ultima parte è stata possibile grazie alla testimonianza di genitori che hanno intrapreso questa scelta e che ho individuato grazie al social network Facebook, in cui essi avevano aderito ad un gruppo chiamato "Bilinguismo per famiglie monolingui". Dato che a questo gruppo aderiscono più di 600 persone, ho ideato un questionario sull'esperienza linguistica che queste famiglie stanno vivendo, per riuscire a raccogliere dati in modo più sistematico e chiaro. Il questionario è stato completato da 33 genitori e riguardava 38 bambini. Esso è suddiviso in diverse sezioni: una parte generale sull'età del bambino, la seconda lingua parlata a casa, e il livello di lingua del genitore; *Primi passi* (ovvero una visione generale sull'organizzazione del bilinguismo a casa, quando hanno iniziato questa esperienza e quando l'hanno pianificata), *Domande sul genitore* (ovvero quanto tempo parla al bimbo in italiano e nella seconda lingua); *Domande su familiari ed altre persone*, *Domande sul bambino* (la scuola che frequenta, l'ammontare delle ore quotidiane di esposizione alla seconda lingua, le attività svolte in entrambe le lingue, la lingua parlata con i fratelli...) e per terminare *Comportamento nei confronti delle due lingue* (riguardo eventuali episodi di rifiuto/confusione, livello di soddisfazione di quest'esperienza e volontà di continuarla in futuro...).

Il risultato ottenuto dai dati raccolti è molto incoraggiante e positivo: la totalità dei genitori è pienamente soddisfatta della scelta fatta ed è assolutamente convinta di continuare questo progetto nel futuro.

In quest'ultimo capitolo della tesi viene inoltre dato spazio ad esperienze simili di bilinguismo in famiglie monolingui che avvengono all'estero: tramite Internet sono entrata in contatto con famiglie americane e tedesche che hanno operato questa scelta e hanno creato un blog per dar testimonianza non solo dei successi e dei progressi ma anche dei dubbi e dei fallimenti che hanno incontrato nel loro percorso.

Questa tesi è stata utile poiché non ha solo portato alla luce un fenomeno che prende sempre più piede in un mondo globalizzato in cui le lingue sono il *passepartout* di questo inarrestabile progresso, ma ha anche dato adito a storie di famiglie e genitori

che hanno diverse origini e modi di vivere ma che sono accomunate dal desiderio di donare ai propri figli il dono del bilinguismo.