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Bilingual Children and code switching

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Abstract
In this degree project I have examined bilingual families’ attitudes towards their children’s bilingualism and code switching. My research questions are how and when the informants’ children mix between their languages and if the parents have positive or negative attitudes towards their children’s language mixture. I have also asked what the bilingual families feel about bilingualism. As a method I have chosen to make qualitative interviews with my informants. Three families have been interviewed with different languages and backgrounds.

The results indicate that bilingualism confers an increased interest for language and increased language awareness. Some of the informants state that their children often switch between the languages while others do not mix at all. The informants have a very positive attitude towards bilingualism and they do not see a problem in their children’s code switching.

Mother tongue, code switching, consecutive and sequential bilingualism, majority and minority language
CONTENT

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................. 4

PURPOSE ...................................................................................................................................... 6
QUESTIONS .................................................................................................................................... 6

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ................................................................................................................... 7

CRITICAL TERMS .............................................................................................................................. 10

SEQUENTIAL AND SIMULTANEOUS BILINGUALISM .................................................................... 11

METHOD ........................................................................................................................................... 15

INTERVIEWS ................................................................................................................................... 15
SELECTION ....................................................................................................................................... 17
PROCEDURE ...................................................................................................................................... 18
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ............................................................................................................. 19

RESULTS .......................................................................................................................................... 20

INTERVIEW WITH LEO AND MARINA (THE RUSSIAN FAMILY) .................................................... 20
INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL AND REBECKA (THE HEBREW-POLISH FAMILY) .............................. 23
INTERVIEW WITH GEORGIOU AND PETRA (THE GREEK-SWEDISH FAMILY) .............................. 26

ANALYSIS .......................................................................................................................................... 29

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................................... 32

REFERENCES ..................................................................................................................................... 34

APPENDIX 1 ....................................................................................................................................... 35
Introduction

In today’s society there are many children who have another mother tongue beside Swedish. When those bilingual children begin kindergarten and school, they will need help with developing both their mother tongue and their Swedish. Our children are our future and it is important for them to acquire Swedish while keeping their mother tongue. Another reason why it is important to acquire a mother tongue is that it makes it easier to learn a second language. This is confirmed by Naucler (1996, p. 5).

Talking two or more languages is not uncommon in Sweden. Being able to switch between two languages even within the same sentence is not strange for bilinguales. According to Ladberg and Nyberg (1996) many grownups are concerned when they hear their children are switching between languages. However, to switch languages is a natural way to acquire and speak many languages.

Everybody knows what bilingualism means (Harding & Riley, 1994, but the definition of the term is very complex. Most people define individual bilingualism as the ability to speak two languages fluently.

According to Grosjean too much emphasis has been put on fluency to the detriment of other factors such as the regular use, and the bilingual’s need to have certain skills (reading and writing) in one language but not in the other.

According to Grosjean (1982) a language is not only an instrument of communication. It is also a symbol of social or group identity, an emblem of group membership and solidarity. Language as an instrument and as a symbol of group identity is accompanied by attitudes and values. In a community were different language groups coexist, language attitudes play an important role in the lives of the users of these languages. Societal bilingualism refers to the way multiple terminologies are used in and by a community (Håkansson, 2003). One example of societal bilingualism is the availability of newspapers and other print media in more than one language. Another example, common in the United States, is when the home language is a minority language different from the terminology used in school (i.e., the majority language, English).
Societal bilingualism is frequently referred to as diglossia, which indicates the use of two terminologies within one community in which the two languages have different functions. It is important to note that not all individuals in a diglossic community are necessarily bilingual.

According to Ladberg (2003) being bilingual or knowing more than one language, has often nothing to do with if an individual is diligent in languages. Ladberg points out that it has to do with one’s different needs. Ladberg continues to explain that if you have many languages in everyday life, it is not important to know all of the languages, but to be able to use them in the right context. I as a researcher to this dissertation and a future teacher believe it is important to explicit multilingualism. It is also significant for bilingual students to have a good start in their language development. Students with a different mother tongue than Swedish have increased the last few years. This is a result of increased globalization and immigration. Those children who immigrate to Sweden and approach the Swedish school are getting much support in language development. They receive this through their mother tongue and Swedish as a second language acquisition. The knowledge for the teachers within the multilingual area is important and interesting, due to the fact that almost all teachers will meet second language students.

The reasons for my interest in language mix are partly based on my own experiences. Another reason for my interest in this subject is my daughter´s language mix in her language when talking to me. For me it has always been obvious that my daughter will learn Polish, since it is my mother tongue. As a parent to a bilingual child I have often considered the importance of bilingual children’s language development, and during my education at the school of education I have become more interested in this subject. As a teacher I will encounter children from different cultures who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue, and where one language is more dominant than the other. In the Swedish school curriculum it says very clearly that schools should make use of students´ background, previous experiences and language. This makes me more interested in understanding what good language development is, and how I, as a teacher, can help my bilingual students to achieve this, knowing that language mix is a major part of their language acquisition.
Purpose
My purpose with this dissertation is to find out what bilingualism means to bilingual families. My aim is also to investigate the parents experience and their attitudes to their children’s language mix.

Questions
The purpose in this dissertation is to answer the following questions:

- What attitudes and experiences of bilingualism do some parents of bilingual children express?
- What attitudes do the parents have towards their children’s code switching?
Previous research

In many countries in the world people speak more than one language. Sweden is seen as a monolingual country even though many languages are spoken in schools. The English language today is considered as a language with a strong status. The development of the English language in Sweden and the impact it has on the Swedish language within certain domains has occurred in many ways. English movies are never dubbed in Sweden in contrast to countries like Italy and Germany and many other countries in Europe. On the one hand the influence of the English language can be seen as something positive for the increasing internalization, but on the other hand it can also be seen as something negative if certain domains are taken over by English (Håkansson, 2003).

François Grosjean (1982) mentions in his book that most bilinguals appreciate being able to communicate with people from different cultures. Others feel that bilingualism gives two perspectives on life, that it fosters open-mindedness, gives more job opportunities, and allows one to read literature in the original. He has examined how much a person integrates with a language and a culture which he finds himself in. Grosjean mentions an English woman, a native English speaker who settled in France at the age of twenty one and married a French man. She mentions that it is easier for her to express her emotions in French, her second language than in English. Other bilinguals have reported similar trends: swearing in one language is easier than in the other, either because it is the bilingual’s first language or as in this case the bilingual feels freer to do so in that language.

The development of the mother tongue supports the acquisition of the other languages (Ladberg, 1996). Parents do not wish their children to have L1 lessons for the reason that it could prevent their children to learn Swedish. Swedish parents may be concerned when their children learn words in other languages; they believe it is done at the expense of Swedish. Many take it for granted that the children develop the Swedish language in a better way. Others, on the contrary assume, that children learn new languages automatically. It is sufficient for many individuals that children acquire languages in the environment they find themselves in.
People do not consider bilingualism as something positive. Michelle Cadeau (2008) mentions in her study two researchers Paul and Lambert, who changed researchers’ negative attitudes and thoughts about bilingualism. They made a study where they compared bilingual (English and French) and monolingual English speaking children’s result on an IQ test. The result indicated that bilingual children performed much better in most areas. The conclusion drawn is that the bilingual children’s better results and performances was due their bilingualism. This contributed in a positive way on the children’s mental flexibility and their overall ability. Bilingual children are also two to three years ahead of their monolingual friends in the semantic development. According to new studies, bilingual children have more capacity to learn compared with monolingual children.

Ladberg (1996) mentions in her book an author, George Saunders, who describes the process of his son’s language development over a period of eight years. The family lives in Australia. The father talks German with the boys and the mother and everybody else talk English, which is the majority language. The boy’s mother also has a good knowledge of German. The boys talk both languages, but English dominates. German is spoken only by the father, who devotes most of his time to the boys. The boys speak mostly English with their father and German starts to predominate at an early stage. It occurs for both boys that their German is influenced by English, but the mistakes are minor and disappear gradually. Both boys had a period when they were hesitating talking German, especially when they were tired or upset. Saunders indicates that the boys most likely would have switched over completely to English if he had not been so determined to wait for an answer in German, when they responded in English. He had never forced the boys to talk German if their resistance had been great. He would have agreed “ok, and then let us talk English”. The most important issue is that communication functions and is positive for the boys.

Cunningham & Andersson (2004) claim that a family with two languages will usually find a regular way of defining how the languages are used, depending on where they live and how well the parents speak each other’s language. A French-German couple living in Germany may thus speak French between themselves and German in the company of others. If they started using
one or other language with each other, because one of them did not speak the other’s language, they may not be able to change easily if a time comes when it would make more sense to speak the other language. Parents need to have organized their linguistic system before children are born, and come to a decision what language will be in use when talking to the child. They give an example where an American woman and a Swedish man met, while they were both studying in Germany. They began speaking German together. When they married and moved to Sweden they gradually started to speak English together. When the woman started learning Swedish she wanted them to speak Swedish together, which they still do although they still, alternate with English, depending on the subject matter. When their son was born, they each spoke their own native language with him.

Many people lack knowledge about bilingualism and think it may be harmful for children to grow up with many languages. It still happens that parents are being advised not to use several languages with their children in order not to confuse them. The language status is also a dominant factor. When the family talks a worldwide language for example Spanish, the attitude is much more encouraging (Ladberg, 1996). This is exemplified by Ladberg. “A kindergarten teacher who has been working for a long time in bilingual areas expresses herself: If a bilingual child speaks English nobody usually cares but when people hear Turkish they begin to wonder if it is good for the child”. Children who live bilingual may have different ways of dealing with different language situations and make it easier for themselves. Children at a certain age usually want a specific person to stick to one language, the language she begins with the child. It may happen that children are angry or upset and refuse to respond when an adult uses “a different language”. The communication between parents and the children is more important than the language itself, no matter in what way it occurs.
Critical terms

In this chapter I will bring up the most important definitions and critical terms to do with bilingualism.

Bilingualism

Although childhood bilingualism is a worldwide phenomenon, few studies have examined why some children become bilingual while some become monolingual. Most children become bilingual in a “natural” way in that sense that both parents in a family speak two languages. A bilingual child understands when someone is speaking another language, and is able to switch automatically into speaking it with them. According to Harding and Riley (1996) when a child knows how to say two or more sentences in a language, it does not necessarily mean that he is multilingual. Harding and Riley mean that an individual can never be completely knowledgeable about a language, but they mean that people are bilingual when meaningful expressions are used in a foreign language. That is to say, the child is bilingual when he/she talks his/her parents language which is not the same as the majority language, in society or at school.

Mother tongue

The mother tongue may be the language which parents and relatives use with the children in the home environment. The mother tongue may also be the first language children acquire from their parents. According to Håkansson (2003) the mother tongue is the language which the children acquire first. According to the popular criteria Skuttnabb & Kangas (2000) mentions, the mother tongue is the language you dream and think in. Many cultures define mother tongue as the language spoken by the mother.

Code switching

Ladberg (2003) brings up the phenomena code switching. According to Ladberg children are able to switch between two languages, since they are not aware that they communicate with two languages simultaneously. This occurs at an early stage in the child’s life, around the age of two. At a later stage they usually differ between two languages and use the knowledge they have acquired in their language, or people whom they communicate with. When children add a word from another language in a sentence or when they point at something instead of saying the name
of the object, than it is obvious that they did not learn the expression for it. What is to be done according to Ladberg is to provide the child’s words in this language, at the same time to confirm that it was understood what the child will say. For example if a child says "Kan jag få … pluma (penna)? As a pedagogue you can help the child by saying: "Vad är det du vill ha? Å du vill ha en penna? Varsågod". (Ladberg, p. 30)

**Sequential and simultaneous bilingualism**

Language researchers talk about two kinds of bilingualism: simultaneous and sequential bilingualism. Sequential bilingualism means that children learn two languages at the same time. According to Håkansson (2003) children who have developed a simultaneous bilingualism already have acquired two languages. There is a significant difference between a simultaneous bilingual child and a monolingual child in their ability to separate between the two languages. This separation process occurs sequentially with bilingual children, only when they are fully aware about the two languages in their present environment. The first period of the child’s language acquisition is characterized by a mixed stage, where the children have combined words from both languages Arnberg (2008). This is why they cannot see the distinction between the two languages’ vocabulary. In this phase, phrases where the children combine words from both languages often appear: “Titta bunny, en piggies” etc. With time it is obvious for children that there are several languages that are being spoken in their surrounding, and thanks to this language awareness the children’s code switching diminishes sharply.

**Sequential**

Sequential bilingualism means that the child starts learning the second language when she/he has already established a first language, generally at the age of three (Håkansson, 2003). The significant difference between first language acquisition and second language acquisition is that in the first case the cognitive development and the language development take place at the same time. When it comes to second language acquisition the child is already in control of one language and has reached a certain level of maturity in the cognitive process.
According to Harding & Riley (2006) sequential bilingualism is a rather frequent phenomenon which can appear when moving from one country to another. Another reason for sequential bilingualism is when parents talk their minority language with their children at home. In this way the children learn the minority language first, while later, when they start kindergarten, the majority language becomes a major part of their life.

**Minority language**
Minority language (Arnberg, 1998) means the first language (L1) of the parents while the second language (L2) is the same as the official or more common language in society. Parents can decide to talk only the minority language at home, in order to compensate the influence of the majority language outside home. Parents can dedicate themselves to this strategy if both of them have the same minority language or talk it fluently. An advantage with parents talking the minority language is that there is no risk for the children to answer in the majority language since the child associates the minority language with the family’s language.

**Majority language**
Harding and Riley (1996) mean that a bilingual child learns how to use the majority language when the child feels the need to actively use the language, for instance when the child is making friends or begins the kindergarten etc. Harding and Riley realize that parents to bilingual children should not panic in any way, only because their children do not start talking a majority language for example at the age of three. The children will definitely acquire the language later when they will find the need to express themselves. Harding and Riley show that bilingual children in general start talking later than monolingual children.

**One parent, one language strategy**
The most common strategy for parents in bilingual families is the “one-parent, one language strategy”. Skutnabb & Kangas (1981) associates this with natural bilinguals who have learned both languages without any formal teaching. They have acquired both languages by internal reasons, such as parents talking different languages, or by external reasons such as people in society speaking another language than one person in the family. Following this system, children
associate every language with a certain person, and learn to differentiate the languages in a natural way. They also acquire the languages without any effort (Arnberg, 2008). However parents who choose this “one parent one language” strategy must be consistent and determined to practice their mother tongue.

It is a necessity for the parents to accept each other’s language and endure when they do not always understand what the children and the other parent are talking about. Ladberg (1994) describes a Persian speaking father in an investigation where parents talk a different minority language, who expresses himself in the following way: “It is awfully irritating when I do not understand”. A Finnish mother responds:”He feels himself left behind when I talk Finnish, much more than I feel when he talks Persian with the children” (p. 67).

There is internal family pressure in bilingual families on children to become bilingual. Many of the earlier research studies that come from bilingual families have shown positive results. Skutnabb- Kangas (1981) describes in her book some case studies about bilingual children; there “one parent one language strategy” is used. This strategy is used in one of the families examined in this dissertation.

Additive and subtractive bilingualism
According to Baker (1995) bilingualism can be describes as a continuum from additive bilingualism to subtractive bilingualism. When children communicate in a majority language or have possibilities to become bilingual in another majority or minority language, this is usually regarded as additive bilingualism. The child is receiving a new language and a new culture from home or from school without losing anything. Regardless if the first language is a first or a second language it will not jeopardize the first language.

Baker (1996) points out that subtractive bilingualism occurs when the development of the second language is detrimental to the development and maintenance of the first language. Through this a person may come to have lower esteem for the culture of their first language. This can happen in many situations, for example when the first language is regarded as unnecessary for education
has a lower status in the community or is simply not supported. Subtractive bilingualism is directly related to less positive self esteem, loss of cultural identity and a failure in education and finding work. Another situation occurs when a child with minority language is expected to learn a majority language at home or at school. The purpose with this is that the majority language will dominate and even replace the minority language. This phenomena is called subtractive bilingualism.
Method

In my dissertation I will use one method: qualitative interviews. During the spring 2009 I have visited three families who talk different languages. All those families have children under the age of four, and the children are still in an early stage in their language development. My informants are the children’s parents. Jan Trost (2004) writes that in a qualitative study it is possible to access what an “individual thinks and feels” and understand individuals’ ways of reason and reacting.

Interviews

According to Hatch (2002), qualitative interviews are special kinds of conversation or speech events that can be distinguished from other speech events, such as lectures, sales or friendly conversations. The kind of qualitative interviews I will be using in this dissertation are formal interviews. Those interviews are sometimes called “structured”, “semi structured” or “in depth” interviews. When using this kind of interview, I as a researcher is “in charge” of leading the interviews: a set time is established, guided questions are prepared and they are most often recorded on tape. The formal qualitative interviews will help me as a researcher to go deeply into the understanding of the informants. Formal interviews are distinguished from informal because they are planned events. As a researcher it is important to be structured and flexible at the same time. In order to answer my research questions I have chosen to ask these interview questions which are taken from the biographical context and children’s language (for full reference see questions, appendix 1).

- How do you feel your mother tongue is valued/considered in Sweden? Is there status connected to being able to speak it?
- How do you consider your own bilingualism? What does it mean for you? What do you think it has given you? Was it easier for you to learn other languages thanks to your bilingualism?
- Have you experienced some disadvantages being bilingual? The answers I got on these questions were that one of the interviewed families sees their mother tongue as a highly valued status language in Sweden.
The other two interviewed families do not consider their mother tongues as a status language in Sweden. To get answers on my other second research question, I assumed it was important to ask these questions which come with some follow up questions from the section on children’s languages. The questions were:

- Did you consciously choose to raise your children bilingual? Why did you want to raise them bilingual-what advantages does it have for them/for you? Has it been complicated to raise your children bilingual?
- Are your children often switching between languages? Can you describe some situations where your children switch languages? Sometimes you hear people having a negative response to children who are growing up bilingual. This is due to the fact that it would complicate the child’s language development.
- Have you ever felt negative attitudes towards bilingualism? Have you ever felt negative language prejudices? If you have experienced this, what was the outcome of those consequences?

The interviewed families have consciously chosen to raise their children bilingual and they do not find it complicated. None of the families seem concerned about their children’s language switch; neither do they see it as an obstacle or something strange. They are convinced that it is a regular process in bilingualism. The interviewed families have not felt any negative attitudes or prejudices towards bilingualism. In their opinion they do not see bilingualism as something which complicates their environment for the children.

According to Johansson & Svedner (2006), the purpose of using qualitative interviews is to get as detailed and thorough answers as possible. In a qualitative interview, only the question areas are predetermined, but the questions can vary from one interview to another depending on the informants’ answers. The interview questions in my study are preformed with follow up questions. I have chosen open-ended questions with the intention to get as many broad and reliable answers as possible. Trost (2006) mentions that using open questions is an unstructured method, which means the interviews, do not have any “solid” answers. The informants can choose how to respond. It is of main importance to listen and try to understand what the informants are saying, and not to ask determined questions in advance.
The qualitative part of the examination consists of finding out from the children´s parents, if the children show any language dominance by language mixing and if there is any possibility of transferring from one language to another. In the qualitative interviews I will also explore the informants’ experiences and interpretation of language mix to be developed (Hatch, 2002).

**Selection**

Three different bilingual families have been chosen and they agreed to participate in this study. The three families are familiar with the interviewer. The families have children under the age of four and all of the children were born in Sweden. The informants in this study are parents. The families have foreign background. At home they operate in two mother tongues with their children. In the Greek family both parents were born in Sweden to first generation Greek immigrants. They have two children and their common mother tongue is Greek. In the Hebrew-Polish family, one of the parents was born abroad. In the Russian family both parents were born in Russia. They have two children both were born in Sweden, but using Russian as their mother tongue. Although the informants share some similarities, they also differ from each other, due to different geographical and linguistic backgrounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Both parents born in Sweden</th>
<th>One parent abroad</th>
<th>Use languages</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Russian Swedish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family B</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Swedish Hebrew Polish Danish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family C</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Greek Swedish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedure

In this dissertation I will look more closely at my informants’ attitudes and beliefs about their children’s bilingualism. I will also find out how their children switch between the languages and whether their parents think it is positive or negative. Before carrying out the interviews there are a few aspects to take into consideration. First and foremost an interview guide must be prepared. This guide is often conducted in different categories. These categories will make out the framework of what will be discussed. Each theme has questions related to it. Open questions that give the informants an opportunity to speak freely and elaborately will be used. The guide also helps the researcher to keep the conversation somewhat structured and focused on the content area (Hatch, 2002). All participants were contacted by the interviewer for setting a date and time and deciding upon a place for the interview (Johansson & Svedner, 2006). After the informants agreed to participate, the interviews and the observations took place in the informants´ home. The purpose was to interview two informants with different background and thus teaching different languages to their children. I prepared seventeen interview questions in advance, and all my informants were told that the interview is about their children´s code switching. Hatch (2002) calls questions that are brought to a formal interview “guiding questions”. These are questions prepared in advance, designed to guide the ongoing conversation. I also made it very clear for all the participating families that my aim with this study was only to interview the parents about their attitudes towards and beliefs about their children´s bilingualism and code switching. The interview questions relate to my research questions which are arranged according to the typology.

During the interviews I made notes, since it is impossible to remember everything which is done and said in any social setting. I assured the informants about their anonymity, and asked them if they would feel uncomfortable with me observing their children interacting in other daily activities. No tape recorder was used during the interviews, which also contributed to a less formal situation and every interview lasted for about an hour. The informants were faced sometimes with questions that they had not encountered before and sometimes they had to explain something that was self-evident for them. Some of the informants kept repeating that
”I have never thought about this before”. Consequently, it was not always easy for the informants to express their reasoning regarding the subject code switching. I know all of the informants personally. The interviews dealt with a number of complicated and delicate subjects such as children’s upbringing, bilingualism and code switching. The interview results were then transcribed and analyzed.

**Ethical considerations**

When it comes to Johansson & Svedner’s basic interview principles. They state that the big obstacle for an interviewer is to achieve as thorough answers as possible which reflect the informant’s attitude and experiences. The interviewer’s research ethic greatly influences enormous meaning for the outcome of the interview. It is of great importance that the dissertation should be built on respect for all the people who are participating in the project. We ask a lot when we ask individuals to participate in our qualitative studies. We usually ask for a considerable amount of time, but more importantly we ask participants to reveal what goes on behind the scenes in their everyday live. We ask them to trust to the point that they are comfortable sharing the intimate details of their life worlds (Hatch, 2002). My informants had confidence in me as an interviewer and respected the purpose of the interview. For my informants to feel this trust I made it very clear for them what the interview was about and assured them that they could anytime break off their participation, without resulting in any negative consequences (Johannson & Svedner, 2006). I assured my informants about their anonymity and that their names and their children’s names would be fictitious. The participants had the possibility to ask questions anytime about the research and get honest answers. By following the ethical research rules, I as a researcher show respect for the participant.
Results

The result of the dissertation is disposed in such a way that the informants are divided into two couples. All three couples are bilingual and have Swedish in common. The answers are represented in different chapters but every couples answer is shown separately. In the following sections the results for each set of question are presented, in the same order as they appear in the questionnaire. Each set or typology relates to one of the two research questions. The questions follow as an appendix. Although the three informants have different backgrounds they have one thing in common: they go through a similar process. Raising a child with two or more languages is a matter of choices and balance.

Interview with Leo and Marina (The Russian family)

As previously mentioned the Russian family is bilingual in Russian and Swedish. Both parents were born in Russia and have Russian as their mother tongue. Marina came to Sweden at the age of 15, she learned Swedish at school and Leo came to Sweden as a grown up and learned Swedish at the Swedish institute for foreigners. Referring back to the terms which (Håkansson, 2003) brings up about bilingualism both parents have received a gradual bilingualism. Gradual bilingualism is a frequent phenomenon which is quite common when you move from one country to another. Leo and Marina have two children a girl (Petra) and a boy (Simon) and both are bilingual.

Marina’s dominant language is Swedish and Leo’s is Russian. They both consider that both languages dominate, depending on the environment.

According to Marina the Russian language is not considered as a status language in Sweden. Compared to the Swedish language, most individuals find the Russian language different in both writing and reading: “Leo and I do not experience Russian as a status language” she says.

Leo’s and Marinas attitude towards bilingualism is only positive, especially in professional life. They believe that it is easier for bilingual children to learn other subjects at school.
Leo and Marina have strong feelings about their own bilingualism.

Russian is a language which we inherited from our parents and grew up with. We did not have any difficulties in learning other languages. In our opinion it is not easy to be consistent with one language, it often happens that we mix between the languages which we consider as something negative. We have only experienced advantages by being bilingual. (My translation)

Leo and Marina indicate that the easiest spoken language for their children is Swedish. Leo and Marina say that: “the reason for this is that our children spend most of the day in the kindergarten”.

Leo and Marina have consciously chosen to raise their children as bilingual: “We admit that it was quite hard and that we had to remind our children to switch languages all the time, especially when they came home from the kindergarten” say Leo and Marina.

Both parents have chosen to speak Russian with the children and this is the reason why they need to be consistent: “We want our children to talk the same language like we do. The children’s grandparents do not talk Swedish and that is why we have been so consistent to teach them Russian” say Leo and Marina.

Leo and Marina use different strategies with their children, in order to remind them that Russian is the spoken language at home.

We consider the one parent one language strategy as something positive. The child is aware what language should be spoken to what parent”. Bilingualism for us means that an individual has foreign background and lives in another country. We understand simultaneous bilingualism as a term where children control two mother tongues at the same time. To our mind sequential bilingualism is defined when a child learns to speak the languages sequentially. According to us mother tongue is the language you speak and control it at home. (My translation)

Leos and Marinas children attend a Swedish kindergarten. At their children’s kindergarten the spoken language is Swedish, but there are a few bilingual families and staff. When their children come home from the kindergarten they talk Russian.
Leo and Marina communicate in Russian and do not respond to their children if they
don’t talk Russian:”When the children talk Swedish we pretend that we do not understand what
they are talking about” say Leo and Marina.

Leo and Marina are making a huge effort to keep their children’s’ bilingualism. Leo and
Marina say: “we often visit our home country and our families. The children find it exciting with
languages and change directly to Russian”.

Marina’s and Leo’s children mix languages. Petra who is five years old switches between
the languages when she approaches words that are more difficult to pronounce or when she does
not remember words in Russian but does in Swedish. Marina says: “we then teach her the
meaning of the word in Russian and she tries to pronounce it”. Marina points out that the
children’s code switching often occurs in daily situations, where the sentence is expressed in
Swedish with a mix of Russian words.

Children switch languages and prefer to pronounce what is easiest for them. They are not stupid.
It is important to ask them to try to repeat the meaning in the right way. Simon who is two years
old often switches languages. Marina says that she is not at least worried. Just to speak Russian
with him is on my behalf sufficient. In this way I correct their language, encourage and repeat the
words again, but in my mother tongue. (My translation)

In Leos’ and Marina’s opinion the learning of the Swedish language has influenced the learning
of Russian. Marina and Leo say: “Swedish has taken over and the acquisition of Russian has
become more complicated for us as parents”. Both Marina and Leo have never felt negative
attitudes towards bilingualism. They have heard that bilingual children often start talking at a
later stage. Marina and Leo say: “our children on the contrary started talking early. We have not
felt the negative prejudices and we have been totally unaffected by the rumors”.

[22]
Interview with Samuel and Rebecka (The Hebrew-Polish family)

In the Hebrew Polish family the father is first generation immigrant from Israel to Denmark. The father has lived in Denmark for five years before he came to Sweden. The mother was born in Sweden as a second generation immigrant. The Parents have a daughter (Vanessa) who was born in Sweden and is three lingual. The father’s mother tongue is Hebrew and the mother’s is Polish. The father was born in Israel and the mother in Sweden.

At the beginning Danish and English were Samuel’s dominant languages, and then Swedish took over. Samuel’s dominant languages at work are Swedish and English. Rebecka’s dominant language is Swedish. Both parents speak Hebrew and English.

According to Samuel the Hebrew language is unpopular and even dangerous to use due to the fact that the Muslim population is growing rapidly.

I do not dare to talk Hebrew as open on the streets in Malmö like I would do somewhere else. It happened several times in the past where Arabs sat next to me and overheard me talking Hebrew. I have heard them saying between the lines: look an Israeli is sitting there.

Samuel and Rebecka both assume that being able to speak many languages is a big advantage. The more languages you know the bigger possibilities you have when it comes to career, travelling in the world and being able to communicate with different people. Samuel believes it is of great importance for him to learn more languages due to the fact that he has been living in non-Hebrew speaking countries. He has acquired a better communication by learning more languages. Samuel says: “as I already knew Danish it was much easier for me to acquire knowledge in the Swedish language”.

Samuel did not experience any disadvantages by being bilingual. Rebecka sees her bilingualism as something positive: “By being bilingual I acquired other languages faster and easier” says Rebecka. Rebecka is in deep gratitude to her parents who gave her knowledge in more than one language; this gave her the advantage to communicate with the rest of the family abroad. ”I would not have had a good relationship and communication with my grandparents if it would not have been because of the Polish language” says Rebecka.
According to Samuel and Rebecka the easiest language for Vanessa is Swedish: “She spends most of the day in the kindergarten. Samuel and Rebecka say that when Vanessa comes home from the kindergarten she often meets friends who do not talk the same language”. Vanessa acquires two mother tongues Polish and Hebrew. Her dominant language is Hebrew for the reason that Hebrew is easier to pronounce than Polish: “She is often surrounded by family and friends who speak the Hebrew language” says Rebecka.

Samuel and Rebecka have consciously chosen to raise their daughter as bilingual: Samuel and Rebecka say: “our goal was for her to acquire both our mother tongues which mean two extra languages for free. We believe that in the future it will be much easier for her to communicate with the family abroad”.

According to Samuel and Rebecka it has not been difficult to raise Vanessa as bilingual. “Actually she responded in a positive manner. Samuel and Rebecka say that: “it seems to us that she has a grasp for languages”.

Samuel and Rebecka have chosen to speak both Polish and Hebrew with Vanessa: “We have mostly been consistent; this by explaining to her that we do not understand what she is saying when she speaks Swedish” say Samuel and Rebecka. Both Samuel and Rebecka also read her goodnight stories, most of them in their mother tongues. Vanessa also watches children’s movies, mostly in Hebrew.

Samuel and Rebecka talk different mother tongues and that is the reason why they are using the one parent one language strategy.

We look at this strategy in a positive way. In this way she learns both mother tongues and she also differentiates what language to use to her mother and to her father. People are surprised when they hear our daughter talking and mix between languages so naturally. It always gives result when you show consistency from the very beginning.

Samuel’s and Rebecka’s definition of the term bilingualism is a child who is bilingual in two mother tongues. Simultaneous bilingualism means for Samuel and Rebecka that the child speaks two mother tongues simultaneously, like Vanessa does. According to Samuel and Rebecka sequential bilingualism means that the child learns first one mother tongue and then the second.
Vanessa attends a Swedish kindergarten. Some of the staff is bilingual and that also applies to the families. The majority of the children was born in Sweden, but has other mother tongues. The only spoken language in the kindergarten is Swedish.

Rebecka points out that when Vanessa is coming home from the kindergarten.

She often speaks Swedish to me. As soon as she sees her father she switches to Hebrew with some mix of Swedish words. We are actually not putting a lot of effort to keep up her two mother tongues, this functions automatically. We believe by being consistent and not forcing has helped our daughter with her bilingualism.

Vanessa watches movies, listens to music and has regular phone calls with her grandmother in Hebrew. At her grandparent’s home from her mother side, the languages in use are polish and Hebrew.

Both parents assume that their daughter is often switching languages: “this happens when she comes from the kindergarten. She speaks Swedish with a mix of Hebrew words” says Rebecka. When Rebecka speaks Polish with Vanessa, then she is putting in Hebrew words. Rebecka says that: “I do not know if this happens consciously, due to the fact that she might not find the words she would like to express herself in Polish”. According to the parents she often switches languages especially when she feels tired: “She also switches languages when she plays with herself and in daily situations for example when she showers and eats. Samuel and Rebecka say that: “when Vanessa is playing with her friends who speak the same language, she does not switch at all”.

Both parents definitely believe that the Swedish language has affected Vanessa’s learning of her mother tongues. She spends most of her day in the kindergarten where she is influenced by the Swedish language and by everybody who speaks it. According to both parents it is rather difficult to remind Vanessa in some situations that it is not Swedish she should talk to them, but their mother tongues. Samuel says that: “Swedish became her majority language and it seems that it became an easier language for her to speak”.

Rebecka and Samuel have never felt any negative attitudes or prejudices towards bilingualism. Samuel and Rebecka say: “We have instead got a lot of credit for encouraging our
daughter to speak our mother tongues”. People have always admired Rebecka and Samuel how they managed to be so consistent concerning Vanessa’s multilingualism.

**Interview with Georgiou and Petra (The Greek-Swedish family)**

Georgiou and Petra have two children, a son (Mikael) and a daughter (Anna). Both parents were born in Sweden as second generation immigrants to Greek parents. Both parents are bilingual; they acquired the Swedish language after the age of three.

Georgiou and Petra speak Swedish and Greek on a daily basis with their children.

When it comes to the Greek language, Georgiou and Petra believe that it is valued as something positive in Sweden. Greece is a popular country where many Swedes prefer to spend their holiday. The Greek history is well known and taught in schools over the whole world. In Petra’s opinion the Greek language has much status, not only historical. Greece has ruled many countries leaving a cultural impact, like language and music.

Georgiou and Petra have a very positive attitude towards bilingualism. They find it important to convey their mother tongue further to the next generation. There are widespread advantages for bilingualisms, for instance carrier possibilities: “All knowledge is useful; it would be a waste not to use it” say Petra and Georgiou.

When it comes to Georgiou’s and Petra’s own bilingualism they look at it in a positive manner:

>We carry with us two cultures and two languages, the Swedish and the Greek one. On the one hand we cannot utter if it has been an obstacle or an asset when it comes to acquire other languages. On the other hand we have not experienced any disadvantages as being bilingualisms

Georgious and Petra’s children’s dominant languages differ from each other. Mikael’s dominant language is Swedish while Anna’s is Greek. The reason for this is that Mikael developed his oral abilities much later than Anna did. Mikael learned most of his words in the kindergarten. Anna’s dominant language is Greek. She started talking at an early stage. She began the kindergarten when she was one and a half years old. This is the reason why the Greek language became a dominant factor in her life.
Both Georgiou and Petra have consciously chosen to raise their children bilingual and this has not been complicated:

We have primarily done this for the sake of our children, in order to make it easier for them to find a source of communication with family and friends. Once they move to Greece they have achieved an extra language for free. Above all we find it important that the children are keeping their culture and legacy, just like we have inherited it from our parents. When the children will become adults they have the possibility to choose where they want to live because of their bilingualism. The Greek language and the culture is a valuable asset for them. On thinking of long terms we want our children to use the language in other connections in the future.

Georgiou and Petra have chosen to talk Greek at home with the children and they have always been consistent. The children are addressed in Greek even though Georgiou and Petra mix with people who do not speak Greek. The children also study Greek as their mother tongue. “At home we do not talk different languages with the children; we have the same mother tongue”.

Georgiou and Petra believe that this is a good strategy being consistent with one language: “We do not consider the one parent one language strategy as something positive; it is not good for the children to mix languages” say Anna. Bilingualism for Georgiou and Petra mean a child who speaks two mother tongues: “The Swedish language will always be dominant with the thought that we live in Sweden” says Georgiou. Georgiou and Petra define sequential bilingualism where the Swedish language comes first and then Greek. The term simultaneous bilingualism means for them that the children speak both mother tongues simultaneously. Mother tongue according to Georgiou and Petra is the language which parents use at home.

Georgiou’s and Petra’s children attend a Swedish speaking kindergarten. The staff is not bilingual, but there are some bilingual children. Petra points out that when the children come home from the kindergarten there is a difference between them which language they communicate in: “Our daughter speaks Greek and our son mixes both Swedish and Greek, but mostly Swedish” say Petra.

Both parents are trying hard to maintain their children’s bilingualism. This they do by sending them to lessons in Greek and trying to be consistent at home by only using the Greek language.
Petra points out that there is an enormous difference between her children’s code switching. Anna mixes between the languages when she does not find the right word in Swedish. Mikael’s language development is limited; he switches wildly especially when he does not find the words in both languages.

According to Georgiou and Petra learning the Swedish language has affected their children’s acquirement of the Greek language. “We live in Sweden and Swedish has become dominant, meaning that the children do not control the Greek language as good as they would have done when living in Greece” says Petra.

Georgiou and Petra have neither felt any negative language prejudices or negative attitudes towards bilingualism. In their opinion bilingualism does not complicate the language environment for the children. According to Petra and Georgiou the reasons with bilingual problems could occur when parents do not have control over the Swedish language or do not have any contact with the Swedish society.
Analysis

Answers to the background questions showed many similarities between the respondents within each group. In the Russian family both parents are first generation immigrants to Sweden while in the Hebrew–Polish family only one parent is first immigrant to Sweden. In the Hebrew–Polish family the one parent one language strategy is used as an advantage for the children to reach a high degree of bilingualism. In the Greek family both parents were born in Sweden. In the Russian and Greek family the children are bilingual and in the Hebrew–Polish they are multilingual. The families’ dominant language is their mother tongue and their majority language is dominant depending in which situation they find themselves in. The families do not consider their mother tongue to be valued as a status language in Sweden. The Russian family does not consider their mother tongue as a status language. Neither does the Hebrew Polish family consider their mother tongue as a status language, especially not the Hebrew language. The Hebrew language is only considered as a status language in the meaning that it is considered as one of the most ancient languages. According to Ladberg (1996) the knowledge of a language is an advantage to be able to acquire a higher position in society. A language like Swedish is highly valued in Sweden, but outside the Scandinavian borders it is not considered to have a high value. World languages like Spanish and especially English have reached a high prestige internationally. The Greek family sees the Greek language as highly valued status language in Sweden. Many Swedes like Greece as both their history and literature are well known.

The interviewed families have a positive attitude towards bilingualism. They assume that the more languages you control the easier it is to acquire more. The families also consider bilingualism as a great asset in their career life and above all the acquisition of knowledge about two cultures, your own and the Swedish one. In multilingual societies it is obvious for most people to speak many languages. “People are proud to be multilingual” (Ladberg 2006).

The families see their own bilingualism as an asset. All interviewed families find it easier to learn other languages thanks to their bilingualism. The Greek family has difficulties to express itself about learning more languages. None of the families have experienced any disadvantages of being bilingual. According to Baker (1996) a bilingual individual is able to overcome the gap between cultures. There are even potential economical advantages by being bilingual. A bilingual individual might have larger possibilities in career life. In families where two different mother tongues are
being used, the advantages with bilingual children are varied. Bilingual children can communicate with their parents in one language and with friends and others. All the children in the interviewed families have reached a high level of bilingualism. They are able to speak Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Greek and Swedish fluently. All the families except the Greek one are aware that Swedish is the language their children control best. The reason for this is that Swedish has an enormous influence due to the kindergarten. In the Greek family the girl has a better control of Greek than Swedish and the boy controls Swedish better. The girl has more contact with the Greek language and trains it often. Her parents are not concerned about her development in the Swedish language; they mean that she will acquire Swedish in the kindergarten.

The interviewed families have consciously chosen to raise their children to be bilingual and they did not find it complicated. They have primarily done this for the sake of their children, in order to make it easier for them to find a source of communication with family and friends. The language the families have chosen to talk with their children at home is no other than the parents’ mother tongue. The families have been consistent by addressing their children in the specific language, at home and in different environments. All three families are using the same strategy concerning their children. All the families have a positive attitude towards the one parent one language strategy. The Greek family however does not see this strategy as something positive. They do not think it is good for the children to mix languages.

All the children in the interview attend a Swedish kindergarten. In the kindergartens there are bilingual teachers and children except in where the spoken language is Swedish. The language that is spoken in the kindergartens is Swedish. In the Russian and in the Greek family the children talk their mother tongue when they come home from the kindergarten. In the Hebrew-Polish family the children speak Swedish when they come home but only for a short time. Both families are very consistent with keeping their mother tongue. None of the families seem concerned about their children’s language mix; neither do they see it as an obstacle or something strange. They are convinced that it is a regular process in bilingualism. According to Ladberg (1996) children with more than one language learn how to keep the languages apart and use them correctly. Two year old children can for instance switch to their second language if they notice that they are not being understood in their first one. All agree that learning the Swedish the language has influenced the
mother tongue. The children’s knowledge in their mother tongue has become weaker once the Swedish language has started to be used on a regular basis.

The interviewed families have not felt any negative attitudes or prejudices towards bilingualism. In their opinion they do not see bilingualism as something which complicates the environment for the children. The Russian family has heard rumors that bilingual children often start talking at a later stage. Their children on the contrary started talking early. According to Ladberg (1994) the parents’ positive attitude towards bilingualism might have had a good influence on their children’s attitude to consider both languages equally important and valuable.
Conclusion

Many families face a bilingual/multilingual situation in their home. When parents decide to raise their children bilingual, many questions should be considered. Questions that arise are for example how the different languages should be used and when the Swedish language should be brought in at home. Raising a child bilingual is not always an easy task for parents, but for those families who I interviewed it appeared to be. The informants’ children had reached a sequential bilingualism. They first acquired their mother tongues and later Swedish. All the children can communicate in both languages fluently. Both families had a very positive attitude towards bilingualism. The children in the Polish-Hebrew family and in the Greek one had much easier to keep two languages apart. Those children have not been so affected by the Swedish language from the kindergarten like the children from the Russian family.

According to Ladberg (1996) it sometimes occurs that children do not want to speak their parents’ language. It is not the same to be bilingual in a monolingual environment as in a multilingual environment. If the surrounding encourages bilingualism and sees it as something obvious and valuable, it becomes more natural for the children to use all their languages.

A conclusion you might draw from all this is once you learned many languages, the door is open to learn more. My own experience tells me that “speaking many languages is an asset and a valuable resource”. Code switching among children is something they do consciously relatively, and in most cases it is acquired in a natural way. This indicates that both languages are being used and elaborated constantly. To my thought this is the reason for the language activity. All the interviewed parents agreed on the issue that it took time and patience to educate their children to become bilingual. The parent’s involvements have a large impact on the children. All the informants mean that they have provided their children with a rich and a stimulating language environment. Since their children were born their parents have devoted much time and energy by constantly talking their mother tongue and by using daily activities to practice the language. They have been paying attention to their children and showed interest in what they had to say.
The purpose with my degree project was to find out what attitudes and experiences of bilingualism do some parents of bilingual children express? And what attitudes do the parents have towards their children’s code switching? All the informants agreed that it easier for them learn additional languages. The interview persons have positive attitudes and experiences towards bilingualism. As for the informants’ attitudes for their children’s code switching, it seems that they do not have any problems dealing with it. They mean that their children code switch unconsciously and they do it in a natural way. It is clear that both languages exist all the time, and at the same they that the children use both languages all the time. As a future teacher I will definitely meet children with different cultures and different backgrounds. This dissertation has helped me to understand how bilingualism can influence children’s language learning on one hand and their personality on the other hand. My personal experience in this field is something that I wish to transfer to my future students in order to stimulate their interest to study foreign languages. Having three interviews with different parents gave me a clearer picture of bilingualism. The result of those interviews also agreed with the earlier research that I have written about. My contribution in this research is to point out that once you acquired more than one language thoroughly, then the door to learn more languages is open.

What I have found unique in bilingualism is not only those bilingual children have an easy grasp of two languages but how they operate in a creative way.
References


Appendix 1

Interview questions

Biographical context

1. Do you have any other mother tongue than Swedish? If yes, which one? What languages are spoken on a daily basis?

2. Were you born in Sweden? If not when did you settle here?

3. Which language do you consider to be your dominant language? Are you dominant in them both in different areas? Describe.

4. Do you speak any other languages?

5. How do you feel your mother tongue is valued /considered in Sweden? Is there status connected to being able to speak it?

6. What is your attitude generally to bilingualism? Do you think there are advantages in speaking several languages and if so, what advantages do you think there are?

7. How do you consider your own bilingualism? What does it mean for you? What do you think it has given you? Was it easier for you to learn other languages thanks to your bilingualism? Have you experienced some disadvantages being bilingual?

Children’s Languages

8. What language is easiest for your children to speak? Why? Which language would you describe as your children’s dominant language? Is it different for different children in the family?

9. Did you consciously choose to raise your children bilingual? Why did you want to raise them bilingual-what advantages does it have for them/for you? Has it been complicated to raise your children bilingual?

10. What language did you choose to talk at home with your children? Have you always been consistent? How do you define this?

11. What strategies do you have when using different languages at home? What is your opinion about the one parent one language strategy? What is your understanding and definition of the terms bilingualism, sequential and simultaneous bilingualism and mother tongue?
12. Do your children go to a Swedish-language kindergarten? Are there bilingual families/staff member?

13. What language does your child talk when she/he comes home from the kindergarten?

14. Are you making an effort to keep your children´s bilingualism? If yes how? If no, why? Do you do anything particular to encourage your children’s use of your mother tongue?

15. Are your children often switching between languages? (Majority and minority?) Can you describe some situations where you think your children switch languages?

16. Do you think that learning the Swedish language has affected your children´s learning of your mother tongue? If yes, in what way? If no, how have you noticed it?

17. Sometimes you hear people having a negative response to children who are growing up bilingual. This is due to the fact that it would complicate the child’s language development. Have you ever felt negative attitudes towards bilingualism? Have you ever felt negative language prejudices? If you have experienced this, what was the outcome of those consequences?