GROWING UP CONDITIONS IN BILINGUAL FAMILIES: THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN

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Abstract

Bilingualism is the ability of an individual to speak two languages. If we put this phenomenon in the context of the family, it can be said that bilingual families do not differ in their functions from monolingual ones. The only difference between bilingual and monolingual families is in their communication because bilingual families use two languages instead of one. The process of native language acquisition differs from the process of second language acquisition. This process is contributed by various factors such as parental actions that encourage the development of bilingualism in children, the influence of older siblings and the influence of extended family in native language transmission. Furthermore, different types of bilingualism and the advantages and disadvantages of growing up children in such families are described in literature. The aim of this research was to determine the conditions of growing up in bilingual families from the perspective of parents and children. For the purpose of collecting material for analysis, the interview method was conducted, and the instrument used was a semi-structured type interview. The research included 10 participants, of which five were parents of bilingual children and five were children from bilingual families. The data confirmed the importance of the role of parents in the bilingual planning process. It has been shown that parents most often use conversation, reading books, playing together, watching cartoons, singing songs and video calls with the whole family as motivation for achieving bilingualism in children. In addition, older siblings have been shown to greatly assist parents in transmitting their mother tongue to a younger child, or younger sibling as well as the extended family. The analysis of the respondents' answers showed that they tend to emphasize the advantages of this way of growing up more than the disadvantages. Thus, the advantages include facilitated language acquisition in childhood in comparison with adult acquisition, openness to learning new languages, belonging to different cultures, transmission of traditions, a broader view of the world and better opportunities in the labour market. As disadvantages respondents point out difficulties in explaining, language mixing and distraction in two languages, delayed speech development and shame of incorrect pronunciation.

Keywords: bilingual family, parents, children, language mixing.

1 INTRODUCTION

Raising a child to become bilingual is a decision that will greatly reflect on the child’s life and on the parents’ lives as well in the future. In case the parents plan to stay in a foreign country, it is very important that they ensure to the child timely and gradual acquisition of knowledge of second language. If they fail to do so, such a decision may have consequences in learning lag and the accumulation of school failure [12]. Parents have different roles in the bilingual upbringing of their children. Namely, they have the role of a teacher who teaches in a home atmosphere, the role of a supporter that gives his contribution to the most successful mastering of school materials, the role of advocates and decision maker who encourages a responsible approach to learning [4]. Parents should also be aware of the fact that the adoption of a second language in the family makes life for the child so much easier because, once adopted, he will no longer have to learn that language in the classical way in a foreign language learning institution. This is supported by the fact that the highest scores on the tests are achieved by bilingual children who had the opportunity to learn a second language during childhood, while worse results are achieved by children who only start learning a second or foreign language by integrating into the education system [7]. A sensitive or critical period for learning and acquiring a language is considered to be the period between 18 months and puberty because the child at that age does not analyse the language he learns, which is why he can easily reach the level of native speakers of that language [5].

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Generally speaking, the notion of bilingualism is determined by determining the level of language proficiency and the ability to alternately switch from one language to another. Bilingualism does not necessarily involve the acquisition of two languages from birth and uniform language skills in both. Today, the bilingual population consists of people who successfully communicate in both languages in a way that allows them to communicate optimally [7]. If life circumstances do not make children bilingual, it is up to parents to decide whether to expose their child to second language from birth, which we mean by simultaneous bilingualism, or to wait until later years and his inclusion in the school system, which is known in the literature as a subsequent bilingualism. It is important to emphasize that the bilingualism of children does not imply the existence of a mixed marriage of parents. Moreover, a bilingual child can be raised in a monolingual family and a monolingual child in a bilingual one [4].

As travel is more popular these days than ever before, people are less and less attached to their birthplace or country. The consequence of such a situation is an increase in the number of children who, in addition to their mother tongue, are forced to adopt another language. Many find that children learn a second language much faster and easier than adults. If at an early age they were forced to move with their family to a foreign country, on arrival at a new kindergarten or school, children usually spend some time in silence, the so-called “silent period”, observing one’s new environment [10]. It is by listening to language that children build the foundations for the application of a language in future communication. After this period, a sudden change occurs: children begin to speak second language and become involved in a new environment [12]. Such a sudden increase in knowledge of second language has not been observed in adults so far.

It is believed that bilingual children go through approximately the same stages of language development as monolingual children, and this is confirmed by numerous modern studies according to which the basic ways of acquiring a language and periods of language development are almost the same for children who grew up in a monolingual and bilingual family [8, 9, 4]. For children who grow up in a bilingual family it is characteristic language mixing in the initial phase of language acquisition, in other words, from the age of two until the third year of life. This phenomenon is manifested in a way that the child uses words from both languages at the same time or mixes the grammars of both languages. It is important to emphasize that recent research [14] proves that bilingual children are capable, at a very early age, to control the extent to which they will mix codes (code-mixing) depending on the environment that surrounds them. The above indicates to the child’s very early awareness of the existence of two different language systems.

If we compare bilingual with monolingual children we could say that bilingual children enjoy much greater benefits in many spheres of life. In the case when parents speak a language different than the language of the environment, one of the advantages of bilingual upbringing is the ability to communicate with parents and to build a strong emotional connection with them. Also, in the case when parents do not speak the same mother tongue, the advantage of bilingual upbringing is the acquisition of both mother tongues of the parents [2]. Furthermore, since communication with grandparents and the whole family is important, the authors Harding-Esch and Riley [6] claim that the possibility of communication with them is the most common reason why a large number of parents opt for bilingualism of their children. In addition, visits to the parents’ home country also help bilingual children to develop an awareness of the existence of two languages in their language system. This awakens an increasing desire in children to visit their relatives as often as possible because they enable them to understand better their own roots and thereby strengthening their personal and cultural identity [11]. Bilingualism helps break down barriers, remove prejudice and racism, and also encourages greater understanding and respect for differences. Scientific research has proven that bilingualism brings social, economic and cultural benefits as well as a greater capacity for creative thinking and expression [2]. Children raised in a bilingual family, as opposed to monolingual children, are more culturally aware, show a greater degree of empathy towards other speakers and are more open to different lifestyles along with new, different, experiences [11].

Despite the fact that bilingualism has more advantages than disadvantages, parents of bilingual children are sometimes forced to face some unplanned challenges. One of the disadvantages of bilingualism occurs if a child fails to master the languages he is surrounded by in his immediate and extended family. This happens in the case when the child stops using his/her mother tongue before completely mastering second language for the acquisition of which the mother tongue serves as a basis [1]. It doesn’t occur often, but it is important to know that it can really harm a child’s language development. Another possible disadvantage of bilingual upbringing is the effort that parents have to put in, and which is much greater than the effort that parents of monolingual children put in. This does not only apply to the process of language acquisition, but also to further development such as learning...
to read and write in second language. Another potential disadvantage of bilingual upbringing is the problem of building and defining a child’s identity, although many parents and children claim that defining their identity does not represent a problem as long as they are sure that they belong to a certain group, regardless of the fact that even in such cases an identity crisis is possible and very common occurrence. Therefore is necessary to nurture family relationships, especially with grandparents who represent an important factor in a child’s language acquisition. On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that some grandparents oppose the bilingual upbringing of children, either because they don’t understand such a concept, either because they don’t want to understand it. Thus, if a child speaks a language they don’t understand, they feel neglected and their own grandson/granddaughter may seem foreign to them. Except for the possibility of rejecting the concept of bilingualism by the child’s grandparents, it is possible that the child’s environment also rejects it if it is second language that is recognized as a language of lower prestige [11]. However, regardless of the previously mentioned potential conflicts with grandparents or the wider environment, the decision on bilingual upbringing of children should be made exclusively by parents, since they are nevertheless the most important factor in making such a decision [4]. Finally, whatever they decide, it is important that they provide full support to their children in this, sometimes challenging, process of acquiring two or more languages.

The topic of this article, growing up in a bilingual family, was chosen precisely because of the small number of researches on the topic of bilingualism from a pedagogical perspective, as evidenced by a very small number of professional literature in the Croatian language.

2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research. Examine parents of bilingual children and children who grew up in bilingual families about the conditions of growing up in such families, the procedures by which parents most often lead children to bilingualism, and the advantages and disadvantages of bilingual upbringing. Special emphasis is placed on the role of parents in the development of bilingualism in children, however, this research seeks to reveal as well the role of other factors that may affect the development of bilingualism in children. The interview will be followed by an analysis and interpretation of the obtained answers.

Instruments. For the purpose of this research, the used method was interviewing, and the used instrument was a semi-structured type interview. The interview consists of 18 questions divided into two groups of questions that the respondents were free to answer. The first group consists of questions asked to parents of bilingual children, and the second group consists of questions asked to children who grew up in bilingual families. The questions of the first group are divided into five unequally distributed parts. The first part consists of general questions about languages, the process of parental planning when starting a bilingual family, the most common procedures used to encourage the development of bilingualism in children and the language mixing in the childhood. The second part consists of questions for parents who live abroad with their children and relate to the influence of the peers on second language acquisition. The third part consists of questions about the role of older siblings in the transmission of the mother tongue of parents, asked to parents who have more children. The fourth part consists of questions about the role of the extended family in the transmission of the mother tongue of parents and cultural heritage and, finally, the fifth part consists of questions about the success of bilingual upbringing.

The second group of questions, i.e. questions for children who grew up in bilingual families, follow a similar order and, like the questions for the first group of respondents, are in accordance with the set research tasks. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that all the questions are pre-designed and based on the previously presented theoretical part of the article. Also, for the purpose of better insight into the set issues, the interviewer was able to ask an additional question to the interviewees at any time.

The first step in the research was to select the respondents who suited the best to this thematic area. The second step was to contact the respondents by telephone and ask them if they agreed to participate in the empirical part of the research. Respondents were told that their participation in the research depended exclusively on their goodwill. In addition, they are guaranteed anonymity with the emphasis that the obtained data will be used exclusively for the purpose of writing this article. After obtaining the consent, the exact time and place of the interview were agreed.

The sample. This study included 10 respondents consisting of five parents of bilingual children and five children who grew up in bilingual families. The age of the surveyed parents ranges from 27 to 59
years, while the age of the children who grew up in bilingual families ranges from 23 to 31 years. The selection of mixed respondents, parents and children who grew up in bilingual families, will provide a better review of growing up in a bilingual family. The research was conducted in the period from February 26 to March 15, 2020 in the cities of Zadar, Split, Zagreb, Daruvar and Bjelovar.

At the very beginning of the interview, the respondents were guaranteed anonymity and were presented with specific goals that this research aims to achieve. Also, after being informed about the possibility of recording the interview, in order to achieve the best possible analysis of the work, all the respondents gave their consent to record with a dictaphone. Thus, after conducting all the interviews, the transcription material was created. Each interview lasted in the range of 20 to 30 minutes. Respondents tried to give as detailed answers as possible to all asked, prepared in advance, questions, and sometimes they answered additional sub-questions in order to obtain as complete answers as possible. When analyzing the respondents’ answers, each was assigned a code consisting of two letters and a number.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Planning for the child to become bilingual

The decision on the bilingual upbringing of a child is not an easy decision because in the future it will greatly reflect on the life of the child as well as on the lives of the parents [2]. However, since the examined parents are bilingual, such an upbringing is imposed on them in itself. Furthermore, in addition to the decision on bilingual upbringing, it is also up to the parents to decide when to start exposing their child to two languages. Accordingly, parents were asked whether they decided to expose their child to two languages immediately after birth (simultaneous bilingualism) or when the child has reached a certain age (subsequent bilingualism). The analysis of the obtained answers showed that most parents opted for simultaneous bilingualism, which occurs when a child is exposed to two languages from birth [12]. Only one respondent stated that he decided to expose his child to two languages around the third year of life, which could be considered subsequent bilingualism because in that case the child begins to acquire his second language in the third year of life.

IR5: (...) with my son we spoke two languages immediately, at the beginning. My daughter spoke only Croatian for up to a year and a half. What you can say for a year and a half…

IR8: Well, immediately. My husband spoke Croatian with them, and I spoke Czech.

IR10: No, I didn’t after birth right away, but somehow about three years.

In the case when the child is exposed to two languages immediately from birth, he is not aware of this exposure, which is a great advantage of simultaneous bilingualism compared to the subsequent one [12]. The same question was asked to respondents who grew up in bilingual families. Analysis of their answers shows the same tendency. Their parents also tried to expose them to both languages they acquired at the same time immediately after birth.

ID3: I would say that I immediately acquired both, because they told me that I began to speak late, when I was a child, and that is because my family spoke both, Croatian and English, so I guess it took me longer to begin to speak.

ID4: I would say that it is simultaneous because I moved to France with my mother when I was one year old, so I was surrounded by French from the first year, but Croatian was spoken in the house.

Although it is a matter of simultaneous acquisition of two languages, it often happens that parents decide to give advantage to only one language. When the parents were asked about the advantage of acquiring one of the child’s two languages, they unanimously answered that the language of the environment has the advantage, while, according to three out of five surveyed parents, it is mostly second language. Namely, if the child doesn’t acquire the language of the environment, there can be permanent consequences in learning and school failure [12]. Answers to the same question also offered the respondents who grew up in bilingual families. They believe that their parents, when making a decision, were guided by criteria such as communication with the environment, transmission of culture, traditions, etc.

When it comes to acquiring a second language, it is wrong to expect children to master on their own everything it takes to begin to speak that language. Therefore, parents, as native speakers of a particular language, must represent to their children, above all, a strong support and model that they
will be able to follow in their language development [3]. However, for the language development of a bilingual child, it is not enough for him to just listen to what his parents are saying, it is also important to apply certain procedures that help children to become bilingual. The next question enumerates few of the procedures just mentioned: talking, reading picture books and books, playing together and watching cartoons. This question was asked to both groups of respondents, so a comparison of their answers will be presented in continuation. Analysis of parents’ responses has shown that they mostly used the previously mentioned procedures as motivation for achieving bilingualism of their children, in addition to which they mentioned singing songs and video calls with the wider family that doesn’t live nearby.

IR1: *We motivated him through conversation, wordplay, for example, cards showing objects, here and there some cartoon in Romanian, (...), we also read books in German, etc.*

IR8: *I sang them Czech songs, offered Czech picture books (...) and told stories in Czech, so (...).*

IR10: *I emphasize that it is important to read to the child, that he learns, that he goes to some exhibitions and that is exposed to culture and art.*

A comparison of the analysis of the responses of surveyed parents and respondents who grew up in bilingual families shows great similarity in their statements. Respondents who grew up in bilingual families also followed up on the examples of procedures mentioned in the question and added some more.

ID7: *Of course, we watched movies, series, I read books in Polish and Croatian, (...), picture books, I read magazines, all practically.*

They pointed out that their parents encouraged them to communicate with families, from both mother and father, which was mentioned earlier it the article when it came to video calls, then, to practice written communication in one of the child’s languages and to learn new terms. In addition to the procedures used by their parents to motivate them to become bilingual, the respondents who grew up in bilingual families consider that the environment, i.e. playing with peers, is also crucial, with which the author Baždarić [3] agrees.

### 3.2 Language mixing during the childhood

The phenomenon of language mixing in childhood is characteristic of children who grow up in a bilingual family. Children mix languages in the initial phase of language acquisition, i.e. at the age of two until the third year of life [14]. In order to understand better the topic of this article was made an attempt to examine the opinion of both groups of respondents on language mixing in childhood. Parents, i.e. the respondents of the first group, had to answer whether they noticed that their child went through the phase of language mixing in some period of life, while the respondents who grew up in bilingual families, i.e. members of the second group, had to remember whether they mixed their two languages at some point in life. Both groups were required to cite at least one example of language mixing.

Analysis of the parents’ answers showed that four of the five surveyed parents confirmed that their children had gone through a language mixing phase in childhood. So IR1 noticed that her child mixes languages. She emphasized that, since her child is only 3 years old, he doesn’t utter complex sentences, he utters shorter sentences half in one language and half in another. Other respondents also confirmed that their children were going through a language mixing phase.

IR5: *It’s the most perfect phase ever! I have a lot of examples! Cases in Croatian were a huge problem for them…*

IR9: “Mommy, help me, I am penjing, ha, ha!” Yes, she mixed. (...) *when she doesn’t know the word in Croatian – inserts in English and vice versa. (...) now she is three years and four months old and now the mixing is less frequent.*

The reduction, in other words, the cessation of language mixing at that age is also confirmed by the author [2], who states that language separation begins to occur when a child becomes aware of the existence of two languages in his environment. It happens around the age of four when both language systems are brought into balance. The respondent IR8 describes that her children mostly spoke in one language with the insertion of a few words from another and vice versa, while the respondent IR10 declared that she didn’t notice that her child mixed languages. Since he didn’t spend his early childhood in Croatia it is difficult to say that the mixing was present.
Furthermore, the question of language mixing was asked to the respondents who grew up in bilingual families. Analysis of their responses showed that all respondents who grew up in bilingual families at some point in their lives went through a phase of language mixing that didn’t manifest equally. The following is an overview of their answers. The respondent ID2 spoke with the parents in the so-called mix of her three languages, however, she points out, at some point she almost completely forgot the Croatian language, which is because she spoke Croatian only with her mother. The author [12] points out that it is extremely important that parents take care not to neglect the child’s mother tongue during the acquisition of the language of the environment. She explains that children, while still little, no matter how fast they learn and absorb new knowledge, very quickly forget the same if they don’t use it.

The respondent ID3 says that it was by moving to Croatia from Canada that she began to mix her two languages intensively. It was difficult for her to express herself in Croatian, her second language, until she began to communicate more intensively with her peers and other people. During this period the family also began to speak more Croatian so the mixing decreased over time. The respondent ID4 also states that she often mixed her languages. When she and her brother would speak Croatian, their mother tongue, they would insert the words of French, their second language, for several reasons: ID4: (…) because it is so much easier for us or we prefer that word or we can’t manage in Croatian at that moment so we use the French word.

The respondent ID4 recalled that her parents laughed at her when she was mixing languages. Furthermore, the respondent ID6 pointed out the problem with cases in the Croatian language since he lived in France most of his childhood. In addition, he recalled examples of language mixing in the fifth grade of elementary school. He mentioned a situation in which, on the board, under the influence of the French language, he misspelled the name of a classmate. The respondent ID7 also confirms that she mixed her languages and that the mixing lasted quite a long time. She considers moving to Poland in the period when she had to begin speaking Croatian, her second language, to be the cause of her mixing. After moving, she entered a phase where she didn’t want to speak at all, so she began to speak Polish only after a certain period. This description can also be recognized in situations when children, upon arrival at a new kindergarten or school, usually spend some time in silence observing their new environment, what we call a “silent period” [10]. After this period, a sudden change occurs: children begin to speak the language and engage themselves in a new environment [12]. In addition to the acquired Polish, the respondent ID7 states that after returning to Croatia, she mastered the Croatian language through situational learning. In her opinion, to a small child, such a turn can cause great confusion that can last for a certain period of time. Thus, in her case, the phase of mixing languages lasted through almost the entire primary school, until the middle of the 6th or 7th grade. However, language mixing at a later age can’t be equated with mixing in early childhood because from the third to the fifth year of life, language systems finally separate [4]. Finally, the respondent ID7 points out that unconscious language mixing was particularly present immediately after returning from winter or summer vacations in Poland, and manifested through inability to find the right word in Croatian and merging Croatian and Polish parts of a sentence.

3.3 Influence of the siblings on language acquisition

Since the older siblings help younger siblings exclusively in transmitting the language of the environment [4], the next question wanted to examine a slightly different tendency – help of older siblings in transmitting the mother tongue of parents. Thus, both groups of respondents had to express their opinion on whether their older child, i.e. older sibling, played a major role in the transmission of the mother tongue of one or both parents to the younger child, i.e. to them as a younger sibling. In case of a positive answer, the respondents should have stated which language they used in their communication and briefly describe how the transmission took place. As part of this question, the answers of only two respondents of the group to which the parents of bilingual children belong were analyzed, since the others stated that they don’t have more than one child. An analysis of their answers showed that one respondent noticed the influence of his older child during transmission of the mother tongue to his younger child, while another respondent didn’t notice that influence. Thus, the latter respondent answered the question as follows:

IR5: Of course! My daughter taught him everything! He learned a lot with her because she talked to him a lot. She was older, she knew more than he did. Yeah, she helped a lot.

She added that, despite this, their children mostly spoke to each other in French, the language of the environment, because as a family they lived in France at that time. Unlike the respondent IR5, the respondent IR8 doesn’t consider that her older child played a role in the transmission of the Czech
language, her mother tongue, to her younger child, since they lived in Croatia when they were little and spoke to each other in Croatian.

Furthermore, an analysis of the answers of four out of five respondents, who have younger siblings and who grew up in bilingual families, shows that the respondents mostly consider that, as older siblings, they helped to transmit the mother tongue of the parents to their younger siblings. At the same time, the respondent ID7 confirms its own influence in the transmission of the language of the environment, which was, ultimately, more successful, while the respondent ID6 believes that, more than by his older sister, his mother tongue was transmitted by its parents. The following is an overview of the answers of the respondents who grew up in bilingual families.

**ID3:** *I would say yes. So our mother tongue is English. On a couple of occasions, I made my brother to practice English more, to speak English more, because one day he would need it.*

The younger brother of the respondent ID3 moved to Croatia from Canada when he was supposed to start the first grade of primary school. Although he didn’t have the opportunity to be surrounded by English speakers on a daily basis, except in the family circle, the respondent ID3 points out that her brother has no accent at all and that when he speaks English he sounds like a native speaker. This is also confirmed in the literature, where it’s stated that mastering phonology, i.e. pronunciation, is possible only if the language begins to acquire by the fifth or sixth year of life [12]. As far as mutual communication is concerned, the respondent ID3 and her younger brother mostly speak Croatian. The respondent ID4 points out that it was always more natural for her and her younger brother to speak French, the language of the environment, because they grew up surrounded by the French language. The respondent ID4 considers that, as an older sister, she acquired some things more quickly so she could pass them on to her younger brother, who, on the other hand, is unsure of her influence when it comes to transmitting the mother tongue of the parents:

**ID6:** *I would say no, considering that I have been acquiring it since birth, but again, on the other hand, I repeat, every time when we would come to Croatia, my sister and I would speak French again. So again my sister made me to speak that French. I don’t know.*

Unlike other respondents who stated that they had an influence in the transmission of only one of the two languages, the respondent ID7 points out that she was transmitting, at the same time, both languages of their parents, Polish and Croatian, to her younger brother. Since they lived in Croatia, they mostly communicated in Croatian. Also, they would speak Polish only when visiting grandparents in Poland, however, she notes that these visits, due to the advanced age of grandparents, were reduced to only two weeks in a year. Because of such circumstances, the younger brother of the respondent ID7 has never reached the level of a native speaker despite of the fact that his older sister was trying to read and sing in Polish as much as possible.

### 3.4 Influence of extended family on language acquisition

In every family, especially in a bilingual one, it is important that children, at an early age, build awareness of belonging to a certain environment and culture. Although primarily parents help their children to build an identity, children are also introduced into the culture by the members of the extended family [13] such as grandparents. The purpose of this question was to determine to what extent the extended family, i.e. grandparents, help parents in transmitting their mother tongue and culture to the child. In the case of a positive answer to this question, the respondents of both groups should have briefly stated how that transfer took place.

Analysis of parents’ answers shows that the extended family, i.e. grandparents, help parents to pass on their mother tongue and culture to their children through various activities such as reading stories, singing songs, telling stories from the past and playing together. Just as the respondents stated, telling stories from the past and nurturing customs is the best way to convey the legacy and love for the homeland [13]. The respondent IR1 answers the question affirmatively emphasizing the help of both hers and husband’s family. Since the child’s grandmother currently lives with them in Germany, she is the most in contact with her grandson and successfully passes on the Croatian language to him. During each visit to grandparents in Croatia, states the respondent IR1, the child absorbs the language, culture and tradition. However, since visits aren’t so frequent, she believes that, because of that, the transmission will very likely be difficult in the future.

The respondent IR9 states that both of her child’s
grandmothers participated in the transmission of both languages through communication, socializing, play, and telling stories from their childhood.

IR10: Since we came here, my husband’s family has become more engaged to learn the Croatian language, culture, history, to get acquainted with the Croatian mentality. They influenced more (…) with various books, stories from their lives, etc.

It is especially emphasized that children should be acquainted with the heritage of the country of origin of both or just one parent, as well as with the cultural heritage of the homeland in which they grow up [3]. Accordingly, the respondent IR10 states that her child first became acquainted with her, Russian, culture, after which, with the relocation, he became acquainted with Croatian culture, to which, as can be seen from the answer, the child’s grandparents on the father’s side contributed the most.

The second group of the respondents, children who grew up in bilingual families, was asked a similar question as the first group. Namely, the respondents of the second group had to answer whether they consider that their extended family, such as grandparents, along with their parents, helped them to acquire the mother tongue of one or both parents and passed on them the cultural heritage. In case of a positive answer, the respondents were required to describe the way grandparents helped their parents in the stated task. An analysis of the answers of the respondents who grew up in bilingual families shows that all respondents agree that their extended family, mostly grandparents, helped them greatly in acquiring the language of their parents. One respondent even mentioned an aunt.

According to the respondents, grandparents transmitted language(s) and culture with the help of (history) books, stories from history, stories from youth, everyday communication, writing exercises and, in general, cultural awareness. After the respondent ID2 stated that the influence of grandparents in acquiring the language of the parents was unquestionable, she recalled that her grandparents, on mother’s side, encouraged her to acquire Croatian through reading books and telling stories from history, despite the fact that she didn’t understand much at the time. Her grandmother, on father’s side, was trying to make her aware of their additional culture, the Slovenian one. Despite the fact that as a family, at that time, they lived in Trieste and nurtured Italian customs, it was important to her grandmother not to neglect the Slovenian culture, so she transmitted it in the following way:

ID2: My grandmother from Trieste, a Slovene, would always tell me about the history of Slovenes. She always taught me how important is to be Slovenians in Italy, to read our literature in Slovenian, Slovenian newspapers and watch TV.

The statement of the respondent ID2 confirms that the extended family, along with parents, is a model that children follow when acquiring a new language, encourage the development of motivation to acquiring it and help them establish belonging to a particular culture or cultures [4]. Furthermore, the respondent ID3 recalled coming to Croatia from Canada over the summer and pointed out acquiring the Croatian language with the help of her grandmother and aunt. She states that as a memory of that period, was left a notebook in which, she wrote down new, until then unknown, words in the Croatian language. The respondent ID4 also confirms that her grandmothers were of great help in acquiring the mother tongue of the parents. In the whole process of acquiring the Croatian language and culture, the role of parents was indisputable, points out the respondent ID4, but nothing can replace the experience you get when you come to your grandmothers in Croatia, when you dive into the culture of which you become a part. The respondent ID6 also doesn’t dispute the role of grandparents in the process of acquiring the mother tongue of the parents, and, as the most effective procedure in the acquiring new words, states the act of a daily communication. He also highlighted the environment as a factor that facilitates language acquisition in general. Finally, like the other respondents, the respondent ID7 also confirms that her grandparents were of great help to her in acquiring mother tongues of her parents.

ID7: Surely. Poles are quite, like, sensitive to history, especially my grandfather. (…) I read a lot of history books with him and he was that motivator for me to speak Polish (…).

3.5 Advantages and disadvantages of bilingual upbringing

An analysis of parents’ answers to the question of effort, when it comes to bilingual upbringing, showed that parents mostly agree that bilingual upbringing requires more effort than monolingual upbringing, as evidenced by the affirmative answer of three out of five respondents. First follows the presentation of the answers of the respondents of the first group to the question about the invested effort, and then follows their thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of bilingual upbringing. Namely, in addition to the respondent’s IR1 affirmative answer to the question about the invested
effort, she adds that it happens on a daily basis that her child doesn’t understand what she have said, so she must make an extra effort to explain it in other language. The same opinion is shared by the respondent IR5, who states that she invested a lot of effort in the bilingual upbringing of her children because many things in the language weren’t clear to them, so she had to explain it both in Croatian, their mother tongue, and in French, the language of the environment in which her children grew up.

Such an opinion is not shared by the respondent IR8 who considers that the quality of upbringing doesn’t depend on the language spoken by the parents, but on some other factors.

IR8: I think that it doesn’t matter in which language the upbringing of children takes place. The upbringing doesn’t depend on the language their parents speak, does it? So I think it doesn’t matter at all.

The respondent IR9 thinks similarly, as she believes that she doesn’t have to invest much more effort in upbringing of her child than the parents of monolingual children, because, so far, in the upbringing of her child everything has gone naturally. As the only effort she puts in she mentions switching from language to language, which is probably, on the other hand, very interesting for her child. The last respondent of the first group, the respondent IR10, thinks that she could have put more effort into the upbringing of her child, regardless of the language in which the upbringing took place. Since the respondent IR10, at a time when her child was little, experienced a culture shock by moving from Russia to Croatia, she admits that her priority was to fit herself into the new environment. She also points out that, in regard to the upbringing of her child, she gave everything that was possible at the time, so from the current perspective she concludes that more effort should be invested in bilingual upbringing than in monolingual one.

The analysis of the obtained answers showed that, according to the parents, the advantages of bilingual upbringing of children include the following: fun, coping in new situations, openness to learning new languages, automatic acquisition of second language, easier language acquisition than an adult, better opportunities in the labor market, skipped formal language learning, facilitated learning of other languages, communication with native speakers when visiting a foreign country, a sense of security in a foreign country due to knowledge of the language. The following are considered by parents to be disadvantages of bilingual upbringing: explanation in several languages, mixing languages in oral and written communication, shame of incorrect pronunciation, fear of ridicule.

IR1: (...) know more languages isn’t only an advantage, but also an art nowadays.

IR5: There are no disadvantages, only advantages! A child acquires second language automatically when he is little – that is a huge fortune. At the beginning he speaks two languages.

IR10: This is a big problem when children in puberty move from a foreign country. At first he is ashamed of the pronunciation, and then, after that, he begins to speak in sentences just like a native speaker (…).

In order to gain a better insight into the advantages and disadvantages of bilingual upbringing, another group of respondents, children who grew up in bilingual families, was asked a similar question. The analysis of their answers showed that as advantages they point out the following: ability to think in more languages, faster development of memory and thinking skills, easier learning of other languages, belonging to different cultures, openness, developed a sense of respect for different cultures and people, greater educational opportunities, better opportunities in life, transfer of tradition, greater employment opportunities, opportunity to find a job in the tourism sector, facilitated relocation to another country, watching untitled movies, a broader view of the word, transmitting culture and history, better knowledge of the countries to which the languages belong, human enrichment, situational language acquiring, natural understanding of both languages without the need for mirror translation from the mother tongue to second language and vice versa.

ID2: I think there are really no disadvantages, but there are many advantages. From childhood, you think in 2-3 languages, your memory and ability to think develop, and it is easier for you to learn other languages.

ID7: The advantage is certainly some kind of width which is obtained (...) both through language and through culture (...) which that language transmits. So, I think that language transmits much more than just (...) a mirror translation of a certain word.

As disadvantages, they pointed out the following: dispersion of attention in two languages, problems with language acquisition due to later relocation to another country, schooling divided into two
countries, delayed onset of speech in a child, discomfort in society caused by insecurity in knowledge of the language.

The respondent ID4 doesn't hide the enthusiasm of growing up in a bilingual family, but considers that there are some disadvantages of such upbringing. She considers the dispersion of attention in two languages to be a disadvantage, which, in her opinion, can cause incomplete acquiring of one or both languages. From her own example, she states that by moving to Croatia from France late, during puberty, she missed a lot of things that her peers had already mastered in the Croatian language through primary school. Her language problems continued through high school, so she only managed to master the language in college. Finally, she concludes that she would probably have avoided all the, above mentioned, language problems if she had had the opportunity to attend a Croatian school in France.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research, based on the analysis of the answers of all respondents, confirmed the importance of the role of parents in the process of planning a bilingual family, as evidenced by the fact that parents, after the child was born, had to opt for one of several types of bilingualism and mostly chose the simultaneous language acquisition. Despite the simultaneous language acquisition, it often happens that one language gains an advantage in the acquisition, which was confirmed by the answers of the respondents from which it can be read that the advantage is mostly given to the language of the environment which is mostly the second language. Furthermore, when it comes to the most commonly used procedures to encourage the development of bilingualism in children, the analysis of respondents’ answers shows that parents most often use conversation, reading picture books and books, playing together, watching cartoons, singing songs and video calls with the extended family as a motivation for achieving bilingualism in children. The analysis of the aspect of language mixing in childhood showed that all children who grow up in a bilingual family inevitably go through the phase of language mixing, which is confirmed by the answers of all respondents. The only difference is in the manifestation of mixing since the respondents had different language combinations. The next analyzed aspect was the aspect of the influence of older siblings in the transmission of the mother tongue of the parents. The analysis of the answers of the respondents who stated that they have more than one child, i.e. that they have an older brother or sister, showed that a large number of them consider that older children, i.e. older siblings, greatly help parents in transmitting their mother tongue to a younger child, i.e. a younger brother or sister. The analysis of the respondents’ answers shows that the extended family, mainly grandparents, greatly help parents to pass on their mother tongue and culture to their children through various activities such as reading (history) books, singing songs, telling stories from history or youth, writing exercises and playing together. Opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of bilingual upbringing showed that a large number of respondents don’t find any disadvantages of such upbringing at all, so under the advantages, among other things, they count facilitated language acquisition in childhood unlike the acquisition in adulthood, openness to learn new languages, facilitated learning of new languages, belonging to different cultures, transmitting traditions, a broader view of the world and better opportunities in the labor market, while as disadvantages they consider explanation in several languages, dispersion of attention in two languages, delayed onset of speech, language mixing and shame of incorrect pronunciation.

Finally, it is important to focus on future research in the field of bilingualism. In addition to a larger number of respondents, on the basis of which some generalizations could be made, it would be useful for future research to include the aspect of the influence of the peers on the acquisition of second language. Also, it would be worth to examine the attitude of language teachers towards a child who grew up in a bilingual family and the general success of bilingual children within the education system. Namely, research on these topics would contribute to a better understanding of the process of growing up in a bilingual family and creating a broader picture of cause-and-effect relationships in such families.

REFERENCES


Highlights the impact of parental language management choices on children's experiences of growing up bilingual. Responds to a recent call among scholars to reconsider the notion of 'success' in Family Language Policy research. See more benefits. Buy this book.

Sonia Wilson holds a PhD in sociolinguistics. She has conducted a three-year study on children's and parents' perspectives on bilingualism and the effect of certain language strategies on the well-being of multilingual families. Show all.

This important book urges readers to reconsider proficiency-oriented definitions of 'success' within family language policy. I and growing up as Immigrants: a discourse analysis of child-rearing practices in Russian-Israeli families. Summary. Additional sources of data are interviews with the families on child-rearing in Israel, the host culture, and Russian cultural values. The interviews capture the broader context that explains the data collected through observation of parent-child interaction. Russian-Israeli children are bilingual and argumentative, they control the dynamics of the conversation and gain more power in their interactions. However, in this way they violate their parents' Russian-Soviet perception of what childhood is and what verbal manner should be adhered to. Bilingual children are making use of the tools that they have, which means they pull from two languages, Dr. Brice explains. Sometimes it's easier to convey a message in one language than in another language. Also, all young children make errors as they learn, and for bilingual kids, struggles in English may be influenced by Spanish. In Spanish, no tiene translates to 'he or she no have,' and to a child, that structure is more logical than the word doesn't, Dr. Peña says. Dr. really thought that if I simply spoke Spanish to my children, they'd pick it up, says Marina Ilari, of Milwaukee. Being surrounded by other bilingual families helps everyone feel less alone and more motivated on this journey. Plus, we can remind one another that this is indeed worth it.

Researchers have been looking at how children from single-parent and two-parent families fare in life. So what did they find? Family life is more richly varied than ever before. A growing proportion of parents in the UK choose to live together, rather than getting married. And during the past 20 years about one in five children has been growing up in a lone-parent family. This reflects big social shifts in attitudes and opportunities, some of which started in the 1960s, when women began to gain more control over when to have children. Two large studies in the UK and the US have been following children growing up since about the year 2000. Furthermore, different types of bilingualism and the advantages and disadvantages of growing up in such families are described in the literature. The aim of this research was to determine the conditions of growing up in bilingual families from the perspective of parents and children. For the purpose of collecting material for analysis, the interview method was conducted, and the instrument used was a semi-structured type interview. The research included 10 participants, of which five were parents of bilingual children and five were children from bilingual families.