Multilingualism in today's society: growing up with two or more languages

Multilinguismo na sociedade atual: crescendo com duas ou mais línguas

Sofia Xanthopoulos BORDIN

Luciana Santos PINHEIRO

Abstract: *The objective of this article is to present bilingualism and some of its diverse aspects and implications in the modern world. It provides definitions of how bilingualism and multilingualism are perceived by different theorists and presents some of the problems and conflicts related to the two concepts. Furthermore, it looks into the similarities and differences of first language and second language acquisition and bilingualism from birth and shows the challenges involved for both the parents and children of bilingual families. The article also presents the results of a qualitative research that was made with 11 bilinguals and its analysis based on Skutnabb- Kangas' (1988) classification of bilinguals. It concludes that language is a key factor that defines our relationship with other individuals and that multilingualism is a worldwide phenomenon in today's multicultural world.*
Key words: *bilingualism, multilingualism, multicultural.*

Resumo: *O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar o bilinguismo, alguns aspectos e sua aplicabilidade no mundo moderno. O trabalho fornece definições de como o bilinguismo e o multilinguismo são vistos por diferentes teóricos e apresenta alguns dos problemas e conflitos relacionados aos dois conceitos. Além disso, aprofunda o olhar para as semelhanças e diferenças da aquisição da primeira e segunda língua e o bilinguismo a partir do nascimento e mostra os desafios enfrentados por ambos, pais e crianças de famílias bilíngues. Igualmente, são discutidas as vantagens de ser bilíngue/multilingue na sociedade atual e são apresentados os resultados de uma pesquisa qualitativa feita com 11 bilíngues e a análise desta, baseada na classificação de bilinguismo de Skutnabb-Kangas (1988). Conclui-se que a linguagem é uma peça chave que define o nosso relacionamento com outros indivíduos e que multilinguismo é um fenômeno mundial no atual mundo multicultural.*
Palavras chave: *bilinguismo, multilinguismo, multicultural.*

1. Introduction

In this article we are going to present bilingualism and multilingualism in today's society, the expanding phenomenon of children growing up with two or more languages in their environment. A lot of research has been made on this subject and we have come to realize that there are some conflicting theories about whether or not multilingualism is advantageous for the mental and linguistic development of children (Grosjean, 1982; Romaine, 1995; Lantolf, 1999; Crystal, 2006; Garcia, 2006). However, putting aside all advantages and disadvantages such an approach may have, the fact remains that having to raise children bilingually or multilingually is often not a choice but a reality that parents all over the world need to face. Another aspect that will also be analysed in this paper is that having to raise children with two or more languages also means having to raise them with two or more cultures.

It is estimated that there may be many families whose lives involve contact with more than one language and culture on a daily basis. "There are about thirty times as many languages as there are countries. This entails the presence of bilingualism in practically every country of the world" (Romaine, 1995, p. 8). Grosjean (1982: vii) explains that "… it has been estimated that half the world's population is bilingual". Bilingual acquisition has been dealt with by theoreticians with skepticism and apprehensiveness as far as the benefits of a bilingual education are concerned. Educators and early childhood specialists alike may expect negative consequences arising from children learning two languages.

With this research we intend to point out how important it is to see the several factors that lead to bilingualism: the parents who choose to raise bilingual children because they believe it can only be an advantage for their children growing up in a globalized society; the parents whose life decisions brought them to intercultural marriages and, consequently, to having to bring up their children with two or more languages and cultures and, last but not least, the parents whose desire to provide a better future for their children led them to immigration. Our objective is to present some of the literature concerned with the concept of bilingualism and multilingualism, and more specifically to present multilingualism as a common phenomenon taking place in today's society and enrich its presentation by not only presenting the linguistic research made in the area but also the process of acculturation that takes place when growing up with two or more languages.

1.1 Bilingualisn and Multilingualism: definitions

The concept of bilingualism seems at a first glance to be non-problematic. The Webster dictionary (1961 *apud*, Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p.6) defines "bilingual" as "having or using two languages especially as spoken with the fluency characteristic of a native speaker; a person using two languages especially habitually and with control like that of a native speaker [and bilingualism as] the constant oral use of two languages".

According to the popular view, being bilingual means being able to speak two languages perfectly. Contrary to these definitions that include only perfect bilinguals, Macnamara (1967 *apud* Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p.6) states that a bilingual is anyone who has minimal competence in one of the four language skills i.e. listening, reading, speaking and writing in a language other than his/ her mother tongue. These definitions, ranging from native-like competence to a minimal proficiency in a second language, raise theoretical and methodological issues (Hamers; Blanc, 1989).

Hymes (1972) has called it "communicative competence"; Bloomfield (1933) "native-like control of two languages"; Haugen (1953) "when the speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language", Mackey (1968) "[…] like a relative

competence […]" (*apud* Pinheiro, 2008, p. 22-26). All of these definitions raise a number of theoretical and methodological difficulties which make us go back and revise the common perception that bilingualism and multilingualism are "non-problematic" concepts. All definitions found range from native-like competence to minimal proficiency and refer to a single dimension of bilingualism, namely the level of proficiency in each language (Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p. 7). In doing so however, we leave open the question of the absolute minimal proficiency required in order to be bilingual and allow the creation of degrees of bilingualism. As seen in Odlin (1989, p. 133) the notion of second language proficiency is controversial. When it comes to definition and measurement there appears to be no consensus among language testers about what type of test or combination of tests would form an "adequate index of proficiency".

In order to provide a definition for multilingualism, Mackey (2005, p.1483) clarifies that "to indicate the use of more than two languages, multilingualism is a common term, while pluralism (*G. Mehrsprachigkeit, F. plurilinguisme*) refers to more than one language". Finally, Hoffman (1991, p. 14) argues that "as bilingualism defies delimitation, it is open to a variety of descriptions, interpretations and definitions". She explains that language is part of human behavior and therefore not readily accessible to scientific investigation and research. Scholars from different areas bring different criteria, methods and assumptions to take into consideration in bilingual situations. She believes that instead of trying to make people fit into definitions we should try to create a bilingual profile for each individual or group taking into account variable aspects such as first and second language development (L1 and L2), relationship between L1 and L2, language competence, functional aspects (what, when and to whom), code switching, borrowing and interference, attitudes towards L1 and L2, internal and external pressures, environment and biculturalism (Hoffman, 1991, p. 31).

1.2 Bilingualism: the problem

Romaine (1995, p. 6), in her bilingualism studies, argues that the ideas connected to bilingualism have negatively been influenced by the use of terms like "ideal bilingualism", "full bilingualism", "balanced bilingualism" and many others because such expressions imply that there are other types of bilingualism which are not to be considered ideal, full or balanced. She adopts a different perspective of bilingualism by stating "I start from the premise that bilingualism is a resource to be cultivated rather than a problem to be overcome" (Romaine, 1995, p. 7).

The writer (Romaine, 1995) approaches the subject by looking at what performance tells us about competence and moves on to analyze the problems and phenomena involved in the study of bilingualism. Related sciences with interest in aspects of language tend to focus on

some aspects of bilingualism and neglect others, says the author. Psychologists study the effects of bilingualism on mental processes, sociologists treat bilingualism as a cause of culture conflict and educationists are concerned with the aspects of bilingualism connected with public policy. In each and every one of these disciplines however, bilingualism is seen as incidental and receives the treatment of a "special case", something that is not regarded to be the norm (Romaine, 1995, p. 8). She goes on to explain that even in parts of Europe that were considered to be predominantly monolingual, the influx of foreign workers over the last decades has changed the language ecology dramatically.

Romaine explains in her study that most research carried out on children's language acquisition has been dealing with monolinguals, rather than bilinguals, despite the fact that bilinguals predominate in the world's population, and continues to say that it is not easy to conclude what the "normal" development in a child's language acquisition might be considering the very different circumstances from those studied that a child could be growing up in. "It is therefore not clear what constitutes 'delay' as far as bilingual acquisition is concerned" (Romaine, 1995, p. 181). Several researchers consider a child to be "truly bilingual" only when it reaches the stage where there is separation of the two language systems, reports the author (Romaine, 1995, p. 206).

Gal (2007 *apud* Lhamas; Mullany; Stockwell, 2007, p. 149) explains that the phenomenon of monolingualism is seen as the natural human condition while multilingualism in the popular imagination is assumed to be "an anomalous, exceptional practice". She goes further by referring to the biblical story of Babel which is proof of an old distrust of multilingualism in Western tradition. Monolingualism was seen as a gift from heaven, while linguistic diversity was presented as God's punishment for humanity's arrogance.

1.3 Bilingualism in Society

In his description of language function, Mackey (2005) explains that most bilinguals do not use both their languages with everyone in their community. Even if a community is bilingual, one of the languages may be more dominant and therefore more useful than the other. Such a case includes societies where one language is the language of print, language of the state or an international language while the other language may be a local language. It is however, the language of higher status which may attract the majority of the speakers of the community. Mackey speaks of the bilingual family, a social basic institution which may be composed of people speaking different languages, often resulting from interethnic marriages. In such marriages, speakers are often faced with the problem of language choice. The home language chosen is often beyond the control of the parents. Pressure from society, status of the languages

in the community or the future of the children may leave parents with no choice. "Bilingual families do not necessarily engender bilingual children" informs Mackey (2005, p. 1488-1489).

Edwards concludes that multilingualism could be called the "social life of language". "The 'reality' of multilingualism is that it is a widespread phenomenon that arises for a number of well- understood reasons" (Edwards, 2007, p. 462).

1.4 L1, L2 and 2L1 Acquisition: a comparison

As seen in the results of Burt and Dulay's studies of Spanish and Chinese (Burt; Dulay, 1974:52 *apud* Odlin, 1989, p. 22) there is evidence to support that a child's organization of a target language is based on universal cognitive mechanisms and that it is the L2 (target language) rather than the L1 system (native language) that guides the acquisition process. Krashen (1981) has also argued that a child's second language acquisition is essentially no different from adult second language acquisition.

Romaine (1995) observes that there are several different routes involved in children's bilingual acquisition. Children may acquire more than one language simultaneously or one language before the other, successively. The author also presents arguments that simultaneous acquisition is only when a child is exposed to both languages from birth and points out the significance of adopting such a strict criterion by stating that otherwise, it will be difficult to distinguish the following variables from one another: age of first exposure and exposure to two languages.

Hulk and Cornips (Hulk; Cornips, 2005, p. 163) discuss the differences between children's acquisition of a second language (L2) and children's bilingual first acquisition (2L1). They argue that a clear distinction is made between children acquiring a second language (L2) in the ages of 4 to 7 and children acquiring two languages from birth (2L1), although both are generally characterized as bilingual. The most distinctive difference is the initial state of their emerging grammars. While on one hand, in 2L1 acquirers both grammars emerge at the same time, in L2 acquisition this emergence takes place in a successive manner. There are, however, similarities between L2 and 2L1 acquisition that are rarely mentioned in the researches such as the fact that in both cases the acquirers have not yet reached the "critical age" and still have full access to Universal Grammar (UG)[1]. The critical age hypothesis suggests that children up to a certain age can acquire and assimilate language easily while adults have more difficulty because the brain loses its facility in assimilating new languages after a certain age (Krashen, 1986, p.16). In this sense, L2 and 2L1 child acquisition are more similar to L1 child acquisition than adult L2 acquisition. There are more similarities such as the sociolinguistic environment which

---

[1] According to Chomsky, the Universal Grammar is a meta-grammar that contains the principles or properties pertaining to the grammars of all human languages (Fromkin; Rodman, 1997, p. 539).

influences the learning situation and the quality and quantity of the linguistic input. The second language of the 2L1 acquisition can be the language of the child's family or the community the child is immersed in. Therefore language mixing is possible, as dominance of one of the languages may exist in the input. Hulk and Cornips (Hulk; Cornips, 2005, p. 163) argue that many children acquiring two languages are in a learning situation which has characteristics of both 2L1 and L2 acquisition.

In child L2 acquisition the grammar of the second language being acquired starts to develop when at least a very large part of the L1 grammar is already in place. Hence, although access to UG is still possible since children have not yet reached a critical age, influence of the L1 grammar on the L2 grammar is to be expected. It is the case when the grammar of one language (L1) seems to feed or help the second language grammar (L2) to emerge (Hulk; Cornips, 2005, p.163). Multilingualism studies have also shown that the more similar the 2L1 are in terms of linguistic structures, the greater the likelihood of transfer (Odlin, 1989, p. 141). This transfer can be positive, when it contributes to building confidence in the language learning process.

1.5 Growing up in a bilingual family

According to Crystal (2006) there are several reasons that can lead to the formation of a bilingual or multilingual family. Among the causes of multilingualism he refers to are politics, religion, culture, education, economy and natural disaster. Each of these causes may lead people or groups of people to other countries seeking a more suitable place to live, a place where they can identify with the social groups formed and provide a better life for their children (Crystal, 2006, p. 410-411).

One of the issues that arise when talking about multilingual children is the matter of the mother tongue. When a child is growing up with two or more languages at home, it is difficult to define which language spoken at home we should consider as his mother tongue because both languages used at home come from the caregivers. Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) makes an attempt to provide a definition of the mother tongue using four different criteria: origin, competence, function and identification. Origin refers to the language(s) one learned first, competence refers to the language(s) one knows best, function concerns the language(s) one uses the most and identification is categorized in a) internal: the language(s) one identifies with and b) external: the language(s) one is identified as a native speaker of by others. The researcher also proposes three theses about the definitions. Firstly, the same person may have several mother tongues depending on which definition is used. Secondly, a person's mother tongue can change during her lifetime according to all other definitions apart from the definition by origin, and thirdly, the

mother tongue definitions can be organized in a hierarchical way according to the degree of linguistic human rights awareness of a society (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988, p. 16-17).

There are several ways in which children may become bilingual and this process varies a great deal from one individual case to the other. Among the bilingual patterns that Hoffman (1991) analyses in her study such as immigration, migration, close contact with other linguistic groups and schooling we see that at family level, one of the bilingual patterns is growing up in a bilingual family. At this level, there are many strategies to choose from, but the degree of success will depend mainly on whether the parents are consistent in their language use, if the child has enough exposure to the "home-only" language, if he understands the need to learn both languages and whether he receives the right kind and amount of social support. When consistence and exposure are met, establishing bilingualism at home does not appear to be problematic. However, the maintenance of the "home-only" language is less certain as when the child gets older the input from the weaker language may be too limited in use and style (when compared to the rich stimulus of the dominant language) for the two languages to develop at the same level. Many families around the world raise children bilingually without being able to afford luxuries such as visits to the country of origin, books, videos, CDs, DVDs and films. Furthermore, many parents find the use of such means very time-consuming.

Maybin (2007 *apud* Lhamas; Mullany; Stockwell, 2007, p. 157) explains that children who grow up monolingually, start learning the language long before they go to school. While acquiring their first language they learn how to use it in socially approved ways and they are exposed to the beliefs and values of their community through print, talk and the media. Multilingual children also learn at an early age how to approach their different languages in several ways depending on the social context and the person they are talking to.

1.6 Language and culture

It has been argued that the key to understanding a language in context is to start by trying to understand the context and not the language, thus emphasizing the importance of culture when one is learning a language (Hymes 1972: xix *apud* Kramsch, 1993, p. 34).

For this reason, we will see acculturation as a process that learners are involved in when learning another language different from their L1. Acculturation is the gradual phenomenon of adapting to a target language without forgetting one's native language identity (Acton; Walker de Feliz, Valdes, 1986, p. 20). Guiora (1972) introduced the concept of "language ego" (Guiora, 1972 and Guiora and Acton, 1979 *apud* Valdes 1986, p. 26) to describe the process of developing a second language identity as that of adding on another personality. Anyone who has been close to mastering a second language understands the notion, says the author. The

experience of acculturation, according to Guiora, depends on the psychological health of the first language ego. If a learner is confident in their own culture they have better chances of mastering the second culture (Guiora *apud* Valdes 1986, p. 28), taking into consideration that language and culture cannot be disconnected from each other. Brown (1980) points out that the process of acculturation is even deeper when language becomes involved. The writer concludes that a person's world view, thoughts, acts and feelings are disrupted when changing from one culture to another. Researchers faced with the question of whether language reflects a cultural world view or if it actually shapes the world view have discarded it as unimportant and are concerned with the fact that culture and language interact, world views differ among cultures and that the language used to express a certain world view may be relative and specific to that world view (Brown, 1980 *apud* Valdes 1986, p. 46). According to Vygotsky (1994), during the acculturation process children acquire language through interaction with other members of their culture, appropriate the words of others by listening to them and consequently appropriate the organizational patterns (concepts) of the culture (Vygotsky, 1994 *apud* Lantolf, 1999, p. 35).

All definitions of culture include language as one of the most important parts of culture. Tylor (1873 *apud* Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p. 115) defines culture as "a set of symbolic systems, including knowledge, norms, values, beliefs, language, art and customs, as well as habits and skills learned by individuals as members of a given society". Linton (1945 *apud* Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p. 115) refers to culture as a configuration of learned behaviour and the symbolic meanings attached to it. Bruner (1965; 1973 *apud* Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p. 116) describes culture as a system of techniques for giving shape and power to human capacities. Hamers and Blanc define language as a product of culture, handed down from one generation to the other in the socialization process. They explain that language shapes culture in the sense that our cultural representations are moulded by language. The authors move on to report that in the case of more than one culture being in contact with more than one language in the same society, "culture and language are not isomorphically distributed". When members of the same society do not share the same language and culture, they do not share all meanings and behaviours of that society (Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p. 116).

Cultural identity is defined as the integration of the complex configuration that is culture into an individual's personality. There is a clear distinction between cultural identity and social identity.

> Whereas, social identity exists within the same society and helps the individual to define himself in relation to the roles and the social groups in that society, one can only become aware of one's cultural identity to the extent that one becomes cognizant of the existence of other cultures in or outside one's own society (Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p. 116-117).

Children's cultural identity comes into existence through the development of their social identity because according to Hamers and Blanc (1989) one can only become aware of their own cultural identity through the acknowledgement of the existence of other cultures and the perception of the differences among them. According to Tajfel (1974 *apud* Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p. 118-119) when an individual realizes his membership of a social group they form their social identity. They recognize that they have common characteristics with other members of the social group and distinguish themselves from those who do not. When in a given society certain groups can be identified in terms of ethnic, cultural or linguistic characteristics these will become features used by the individual for ethnic, cultural or linguistic categorization. The writers point out that although little is known about how cultural identity comes into being, there is evidence that the processes of forming a cultural identity start from an early age and that by the age of 6 most children have developed some kind of cultural identity as well as some social identity.

According to Taft (1977 *apud* Hamers; Blanc, 1989, p. 123) in order to become an active member of society, a child is enculturated, taught, the ways of style of life that constitutes the society's culture and, consequently, he becomes culturally competent. In the case of a child socializing in a bicultural environment, enculturation will involve both cultures. When the enculturation process has been completed and the child is socialized in a second culture, he will have to acculturate in order to adjust to the new culture. As a consequence, the child's identity becomes bicultural and in the same process the child also acquires the language of the new culture. Hamers and Blanc (1989) have concluded that the bilingual develops a unique identity, harmoniously adjusted if allowed by the society, but different from the identity of a monolingual.

1.7 Bilingualism: an advantage

As seen in Crystal (2006) being multilingual or bilingual in today's society is not a luxury but a necessity. Europeans see bilingualism as a criterion of responsible international citizenship. It is an advantage to be able to interact with people from other countries on the same linguistic terms. In addition, multilingualism plays an important role in preparing children to cope with the rapidly changing society they live in. It is a factor that can help children become more confident as they are able to deal with interactional situations not usually encountered in their mother-tongue. Moreover, pluralism promotes understanding, tolerance, and respect for the cultural identity, rights, and values of others at home or abroad. It helps children become less ethnocentric as they are able to see their social context in the eyes of the rest of the world and find other ways of thinking. Lastly, multilingualism offers better career opportunities as success

in the international world of commerce and industry has become more and more dependent on being able to speak as many languages as possible (Crystal, 2006).

Garcia (2006) argues that it is no wonder that parents may feel ambivalent as to whether they should raise their children with more than one language because of uneven access to media (internet, TV, educational programs) and differences of opinion of educators and linguists concerning the right age and approach on raising bilingual children. The author explains that parents should be able to assess the arguments and the evidence if they are to be persuaded of the value of bilingualism. Prevalent myths about bilingualism seem to cause doubt and parents are led to believe that such a practice could lead to confusion (Garcia, 2006, p. 139). In Wales, a traditionally bilingual country, the Record of Pregnancy (a document women take with them to antenatal clinics) now includes two important questions: "Which language/s do you intend introducing to your baby?" and "Have you received information about bilingualism from your midwife?" In the areas that English is the predominant language, parents are informed: "Speaking two languages can help your child: For an information pack contact the above" (Garcia, 2006, p. 141). Twf, a Welsh Language Board project promotes bilingualism in Wales through an informative illustrated pamphlet which summarizes the benefits of raising children bilingually in Wales. The pamphlet informs parents that there are 6 good reasons[2] for them to raise their children bilingually: two languages give a head start to learning how to read and count, it is easier to learn languages at an early age, bilingualism will help their children make more friends and give them great job opportunities in the future, learning two languages from the beginning will help children acquire more languages in the future and, by learning both English and Welsh, children gain access to the best of both cultures (Garcia, 2006, p. 145-146). Given all the above, it is clear how bilingualism can be and is considered an advantage.

2. Methodology

In order to point out that multilingualism is a reality in today´s world we created 2 different types of qualitative questionnaires that were distributed to 2 different profiles of a total of 11 subjects whose ages range from 3 to 30 years, and we are going to analyze the information collected. Three of the subjects received the questionnaires in Greek (Greeks living in Germany), two received them in English (Russian and Uruguayan living in Brazil) and six subjects received them in Portuguese (Brazilian living in Brazil). All questionnaires and answers written in a language other than English were translated into English. The information was collected via email or handed in by the subjects (data collected in 2010).

---

[2] Find more reasons in the Twf website: http://www.twfcymru.com/English/bilingualism/Pages/8GoodReasons.aspx

During the research we collected information from parents whose children started learning English at a very young age, in this case from 3 to 6 years old, (Questionnaire Type 1 and from here on referred to as QT1) and from young people who grew up bilingually (Questionnaire Type 2 and from here on referred to as QT2)[3]. QT1 included questions about the child's current age, the time studying English, the parents' motivation, satisfaction with progress, activities at home to enhance their English and factors that influenced their decision to encourage their children to learn a second language from an early age. QT2 includes questions about the subject's native language, family nationality and language background and acculturation.

For the purpose of analysis of this data we are going to use the bilingual patterns suggested by Skutnabb-Kangas who suggests the classification of the world's bilinguals into four groups (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984 *apud* Hoffman, 1991, p. 46-48). She takes the following factors into account: a) pressure to become bilingual, b) the prerequisites for bilingualism, c) how the individual has become bilingual, and d) the consequences involved in the failure of becoming bilingual.

Skutnabb-Kangas identifies the four groups as 1) elite bilinguals 2) children from linguistic majorities 3) children from bilingual families and 4) children from linguistic minorities[4]. Through our research we found two of the four groups identified by Skutnabb-Kangas, the elite bilinguals (QT1) and the children from linguistic minorities (QT2).

3. Data analysis

According to the researcher elite bilinguals are the individuals who have chosen to become bilinguals for future purposes. These individuals acquire both languages without difficulty and the failure in the acquisition of the second language has no serious consequences for the subject. Both languages are receiving wide social support and the native language has a firm and stable position. Our Elite Bilingual subjects (EB) are aged from 3- 7 and have been studying English for varying amounts of time. When we asked the parents about whether they would like to send their children to bilingual schools they all answered that they would find that very beneficial for their children. When asked if they engage their children in activities at home to enhance the learning of the second language the answers were as follows:

- *"Yes, we watch movies in English to see if he can understand something" (EB1).*
- *"DVDs, sites in English for activities and games, the mother speaks to them in English" (EB4).*

---

[3] See questionnaires QT1 and QT2 in the annex.
[4] For more information please see SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove; CUMMINS, Jim (eds). *Minority education: from shame to struggle*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1988, p. 9-44.

- *"She watches DVDs in English, listens to music and reads books and comic books in English"* (EB3), (EB2).
- *"No" (EB6).*

When we asked the parents whether they have travelled abroad and if this fact influences their decision to encourage their children to learn English, some of the parents answered:

- *"Yes, it influenced me a lot"* (EB5).
- *"Yes, certainly."* (EB4).
- *"Yes, after living in the U.S.A (Miami) for two years we almost always spend our vacation there. We are very happy to see how easy it is for her with the English during the trip"* (EB3), (EB2).
- *"No, I have not travelled abroad and it has not influenced my decision"* (EB1).
- *"Yes, I have travelled abroad and it has influenced my decision"* (EB6).

Moving on to the next group, Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) explains that children from linguistic minorities -LM- (such as subjects LM1, LM2, LM3, LM4, LM5) "are under intense external pressure to learn the language of the majority, particularly if the language of the minority is not officially recognized" (Skutnabb-Kangas 1984 *apud* Hoffman, 1991, p. 47). These children may not be offered a bilingual education at school and are often found encouraged by internal forces to learn their parents' language and to form relationships with other people belonging to the same minority group. The risk of failing in the acquisition of one of the two languages bears great consequences. The writer adds that the effects of failing may be catastrophic, ranging from loss of future opportunities to rootlessness and alienation problems.

Our linguistic minority subjects (LM) are bilinguals whose mother tongues are Greek, Spanish and Russian. When asked (QT2) what their native language is all subjects referred to their parents' native language:

- *"Spanish"*(LM1) [living in Brazil]
- *"Greek" (*LM2, LM3,LM4) [living in Germany]
- *"Russian"* (LM5) [living in Brazil]

All subjects confirmed that the language spoken at home is their native language and therefore the native language of their parents with little or no presence of the language spoken outside home. All of the subjects speak the linguistic majority language outside home. When asked how they learn their mother tongue and culture of their parents, they answered:

- *"When I was little my parents would speak to me in Greek and German. Later I went to Greek school and German school and learnt both languages (LM4). -"I learnt to speak at home and with my relatives in Greece. At school I learnt history, grammar and how to speak proper Greek" (LM2).-"We normally speak Greek at home. However, when I was younger my mother and father spoke German to us in order to prepare us for German kindergarten. Our mother*

taught us how to tell the time in Greek and German" (LM3). -"At home, with my parents"
(LM1). -"At home, with my family" (LM5).

When asked if they knew other people their age in the same situation all subjects affirmed that they do not only know people belonging to the same linguistic minority they do, but also people who belong to other linguistic minorities in the same region. When asked about how easy it is to adapt to their parents' culture the answers varied from "very easy" to "difficult" showing that the interviewees have different degrees of adaptation to the culture of their parents. As far as communication is concerned in the two languages we can conclude that none of the interviewees has great difficulties, although some of them find it difficult to express themselves in their mother tongue since they use the linguistic majority language more often.

Finally, the LM members were asked about their national identity. The answers were as follows:

> *"My national identity is Greek. I feel more Greek because I am Greek. I believe that when a child grows up with two languages, it is possible to learn both languages really well, but if this child has more friends that speak his mother tongue then he will be able to express himself better in that language"(LM3). "My national identity is Greek and this makes me feel more Greek!" (LM4). "My national identity is Greek. The way I feel depends on the circumstances. Sometimes I feel Greek, sometimes I feel German..." (LM2). "I have both nationalities, and let's say that I feel myself half and half." (LM1). "Russian. Because I can't say that I'm Brazilian or gaucho even though I was born here." (LM5).*

We can assume from the answers that most members of linguistic minorities feel and identify more with their parent's culture and native language than with the culture and language of the country they were born. Some of them reported acculturation and communication problems and others declared their national identity passionately. None of the interviewees seemed to have problems identifying with the culture and language of the country they reside and all of them socialize with members of both their linguistic minority and the linguistic majority of the country.

4. Conclusion

Without doubt, majority cultures include minority cultures and in order for us to ensure a better future for our children we need to demand changes in terms of attitude for the purpose of embracing our multicultural world. Skutnabb-Kangas (1986) has drawn up a declaration of children's linguistic human rights. These rights include the right to identify positively with their original mother tongue(s) and have their identification accepted and respected by others. All children should have the right to learn their mother tongue(s) fully and all children should have the right to choose when they want to use the mother tongue(s) in all official situations. From

this we can conclude that language and cultural identity should not be suppressed in the context of a majority culture in the process of language learning.

Children acquiring two languages from birth have always fascinated linguists. The study of bilingualism is no longer exclusively a matter of academic preoccupation but a practical necessity in today's multicultural world. Thousands of families around the world are facing the challenge of a bilingual home in their daily lives. Educators everywhere are experimenting with bilingual education measuring its benefits and researchers are providing more and more evidence that bilingual acquisition and education are an advantage for our children who will need to find ways to fit in this multicultural world that we are creating for them. According to the findings of our qualitative research and especially the findings of the questionnaires applied to the caregivers (parents) of elite bilinguals, parents all over the world spend time and money with the purpose of providing a bilingual education to their children. When this education is not regionally available, these caregivers do not hesitate to try other ways of educating their children in another language by sending them to language institutes and providing them with all the necessary incentives. Such findings prove that there is space for bilingual education.

Although there is no one-to-one relationship between our language and our cultural identity, language is the means we use to communicate with our social groups and therefore it is the one factor that defines our relationships with other members of our society (Kramsch, 1998, p. 77). As we can conclude from the qualitative research, all minority language group members have faced difficulties at some point or are still struggling to find their cultural and national identity. In addition, minority language members are not anymore the exception to the rule. Their numbers are increasing due to immigration and intercultural marriages. When the whole world is gradually becoming multilingual it is important to have a clear understanding of how multilingualism works and how it influences the lives of multilinguals around the world.

References

CRYSTAL, D**.** *How language works*. England: 2006, p. 409-485.

EDWARDS, J. *Societal multilingualism: reality, recognition and response*. In: AUER, P. & WIE, L. (eds.). Handbook of multilingualism and multilingual communication. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007, p. 447-467.

FROMKIN, V.; RODMAN, R. *An introduction to language***.** Boston, MA: Thomson Heinle. 1997, p. 539.

GARCIA, O. et al. (Eds). *Imagining multilingual schools. Languages in education and globalization*. Clevedon; Buffalo; Toronto: Multilingual matters, 2006. p. 137-149.

GROSJEAN, F. *Life with two languages*. Cambridge. Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982.p. vii.

HAMERS, J. F; BLANC, M. *Bilinguality and bilingualism*. Cambridge University Press: Shafte, 1989. p. 6-7, 114-123.

HOFFMAN, C. *An introduction to bilingualism*. Pearson education limited. Essex: England, 1991, p. 46-48.

HULK, A.; CORNIPS, L. 2005. *Differences and Similarities between L2 and (2)L1: DO-support in Child Dutch*. In: *Proceedings of the 7th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition Conference (GASLA 2004)*, ed. Laurent Dekydtspotter et al., 163-178. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla. Retrieved from: <http://www.lingref.com/cpp/gasla/7/paper1164.pdf> . Accessed on: 10 November, 2010.

KRAMSCH, C. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford university press. Oxford: 1993, p. 33.

_____. *Language and Culture*. Oxford University Press. 1998, p. 65-77.

KRASHEN, S. This week's citation. *Current Contents*. Los Angeles p. 16, 17 March,1986. Retrieved from <http://www.garfield.library.upenn.edu/classics1986/A1986A270200001.pdf> . Accessed on: 8 November, 2010.

LANTOLF, J. P. *Culture in Second language teaching and learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 1999. p. 29-47.

LHAMAS, C.r; MULLANY, L.; STOCKWELL, P. *The Routledge companion to sociolinguistics*. Great Britain: 2007, p. 148-171.

MACKEY, W. F. *Bilingualism and multilingualism/ Bilingualismus und multilingualismus*. In: AMMON, U.; DITTMAR, N.; MATTEIER, K. J; Trudgill (Hrsg.). *Sociolinguistics: an international handbook of the science of language and society= Soziolinguistik*. 2. Ed. Berlin; New York, de Gruyter, 2005. (HSK;v. 3.2.) p. 1483-1495.

MACNAMARA, J. *The Bilingual's Linguistic Performance—A Psychological Overview*. Journal of Social Issues, 23, 1967: 58–77.

MUYSKEN, P. *Mixed codes*. In: AUER, P. & WIE, L. (eds.). Handbook of multilingualism and multilingual communication. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007. p. 315-339.

ODLIN, T. *Language transfer: cross- linguistic influence in language learning*. Cambridge University Press: UK. 1989, p. 22, 133, 141.

PINHEIRO, L. S. *Bases Conceituais para uma política linguística do português/italiano nas escolas*: Caxias do Sul-RS. (Dissertação) Caxias do Sul: universidade de Caxias do Sul – UCS, 2008.

ROMAINE, S. *Bilingualism*. Oxford: England, 1995, p. 1-22, 180-241.

SKUTNABB-KANGAS, T.; CUMMINS, J. (eds). *Minority education: from shame to struggle*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1988, p. 9-44.

VALDES, J. M. *Culture bound*: bridging the cultural gap in language teaching. Cambridge, Shafte, 1986, p. 20-46.

Annex

QUESTIONNAIRE TYPE 1

1.	How old is your child?
2.	How long has he been studying English?
3.	Has your child ever studied in a bilingual school? If yes, please specify where and for how long. If not, would you like to send your child to a bilingual school?
4.	What reasons led you to the decision to register your child in an English language institute?
5.	Are you satisfied with your child's progress?
6.	Is there any activity your child does at home to practise his English? If yes, please specify.
7.	Are you familiar with the methodology your child's school is using?
8.	What is your native language? If not Portuguese, do you speak with your child in that language?
9.	Do you speak other languages? Which?
10.	Have you ever been abroad? Has this fact influenced your decision to send your child to an English school to learn the language?

QUESTIONNAIRE TYPE 2

A. Name:	Date of birth:
Place of birth:	Country of residence:
Nationality:	Parents' nationality:

B.

1. What is your native language?
2. Which language do you speak at home with your family?
3. Which language do you speak outside the house?
4. How did you learn your native language (at school, classes at home etc.)?
5. How did you learn your parents' culture? Do you frequently come in touch with this culture?
6. In your country of residence, are there peers experiencing the same situation? If the answer is yes, do you socialise more with them or also with peers of other nationalities? Which nationalities and why?
7. When you visit your parents' country of origin, is it easy for you to adapt to the language and culture? Please, explain.
8. Comparing the two languages that you speak, which one do you think you speak better and why?
9. Did you ever have any problems communicating in either of your two languages? Please, explain.
10. Which is your national identity? Do you feel that you are more (parent's nationality) or more

(country of residence nationality)? Why?

E-mail:

sofia@routemaster.com.br

luciana6672@uol.com.br