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**JAZYKOVÝ VÝVOJ A PROCES UTVÁŘENÍ  
JAZYKOVÝCH KOMPETENCÍ BILINGVNÍCH DĚTÍ**

**Zuzana Gálová**

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**LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (PROCESSING  
AND PERFORMANCE) OF BILINGUAL CHILDREN**

**Zuzana Gálová**

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis addresses the phenomenon of bilingual children and their language acquisition. It is thematically focused on their bilingual language development including both processing and performance. It deals with early (childhood) bilingualism and concentrates primarily on children acquiring both languages in a natural setting. The focus is on simultaneous acquisition of two languages which refers to children who acquire two languages from birth, especially within the family.

The aim of this work is to demonstrate the fact that the process the bilingual children go through shows some common features that set them apart from monolinguals in interesting ways, although each bilingual child's linguistic and cultural background as well as developmental profile is unique. The purpose of a practical part of the thesis is to give a detailed portrait of a particular bilingual family and analyse to what extent the children's language development corresponds to the peculiarities of bilingual language acquisition described in a theoretical part of the work.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This thesis addresses the phenomenon of bilingual children and their language acquisition. It is thematically focused on their bilingual language development including both processing and performance. It deals with early (childhood) bilingualism and concentrates primarily on children acquiring both languages in a natural setting. The focus is on simultaneous acquisition of two languages which refers to children who acquire two languages from birth, especially within the family.

The aim of this work is to demonstrate the fact that the process the bilingual children go through shows some common features that set them apart from monolinguals in interesting ways, although each bilingual child's linguistic and cultural background as well as developmental profile is unique. The purpose of a practical part of the thesis is to give a detailed portrait of a particular bilingual family and analyse to what extent the children's language development corresponds to the peculiarities of bilingual language acquisition described in a theoretical part of the work.

The first part of the thesis provides a theoretical background of the problem. It comprises of several main sections. In the first section a definition of the term 'bilingualism' is analysed and several types of bilingualism are specified. The second section emphasizes the importance of family as a primary setting in which children develop bilingually. Different language strategies adopted by parents are also discussed here. The third section focuses on typical features and stages of bilingual language development and clarifies the question of how bilingual children learn to separate the two languages and what is typical of their language use.

In the practical part of this work a case study was chosen as a research method. A particular Czech-English family, in which children acquire two languages simultaneously from birth, is described. This portrait helps readership better understand the language development of bilingual children.

The idea for the topic of this thesis occurred to me because of the fact that I also grew up bilingually. Nevertheless, my personal experience is not a part of this work. My situation just served as a big inspiration in concentrating the topic of the thesis on bilingual children.



## 1. BILINGUALISM

### 1.1 Definition of bilingualism

Since this thesis is focused on particular type of bilingualism, it is necessary to define and then specify what the term ‘bilingualism’ means. There are several different definitions of bilingualism in this chapter. They will show there are many ways of dealing with this phenomenon.

First of all, it is important to realise that the term itself refers to use of two languages. Bilingualism is a word of Latin origin and it consists of a prefix *bi-* and a stem *lingua* which means a tongue. Therefore two languages are somehow involved in all the following definitions.

The Dictionary of Contemporary English (2009) offers a simple and appropriate definition. According to this publication, to be bilingual means “to be able to speak two languages equally well” (p. 150).

American linguist Leonard Bloomfield (1933) also proposed an explanation of the term bilingualism, based on a high level of language control. In his conception bilingualism is “native-like control of two languages...Of course, one cannot define a degree of perfection at which a good foreign speaker becomes a bilingual: the distinction is relative” (p. 56) According to this definition, to become bilingual does not depend on the age of second language acquisition. Someone can become bilingual either from birth or during his lifetime.

World renowned linguist Professor Bernard Spolsky (1998) described bilingualism as “some functional ability in a second language” (p. 45). At the same time he added, “This may vary from a limited ability in one or more domains, to very strong command of both languages” (Spolsky, 1998, p. 45).

Now it is obvious that it is difficult to give one ambiguous and suitable definition of bilingualism. Nevertheless, the ability to use two languages seems to be the main feature of the definitions mentioned above. What is a bit disputable is the level of a command of a second language.

Another use of the term bilingualism is to refer to a social bilingualism. This conception is not related to a language use of individuals, but it concerns using two languages in one ethnic community. So not only individuals but whole societies can be bilingual. There are several nations which are officially bilingual, which means they have two official languages. Canada, Finland, Cyprus or Israel can serve as an example (Grosjean, 1982, p. 11).

Definition including both mentioned approaches was, for example, stated in Academic Dictionary of Foreign Words (1995). It describes bilingualism as “an active use of two (usually mother and foreign) languages by a society or an individual” (p. 445).

## **1.2 Types of individual bilingualism**

The basic distinction between individual and social (or official) bilingualism was mentioned in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, there are some other types of bilingualism which have to be stated. Since this thesis focuses on bilingual individuals and not on bilingual societies, this chapter concentrates on different types of bilingualism related to individuals.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, the difference between early and late bilingualism are demonstrated in this chapter, then, concentrating on early bilingualism, two possible ways of becoming bilingual in childhood are mentioned and finally, focusing on natural language acquisition, a simultaneous and successive bilingualism are described.

### **1.2.1 Early vs. late bilingualism**

At first it is important to point out the age at which individuals become bilingual. According to the age of a second language (L2) acquisition, two basic types of bilingualism can be distinguished. These are ‘early bilingualism’ and ‘late bilingualism’.

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<sup>1</sup> Li Wei (2000) has stated very detailed table of types of bilingualism. For further information see Table 1 in Appendix.

‘Early bilingualism’, sometimes also called “infant” or “child bilingualism” (Harding & Riley, 1999) refers to those people who have acquired two languages from birth or early in childhood. Průcha (2011) described child bilingualism as “a language competence of a child who acquires two languages before school attendance, on the level similar to the one on which a monolingual child acquires one language” (p. 164).

On the contrary, ‘late bilingualism’ refers to individuals who have become bilingual in adulthood. Infant bilingualism is naturally associated with simultaneous acquisition of both languages; child and late bilingualism rather involves so called successive acquisition<sup>2</sup> (Harding & Riley, 1999, pp. 39-42).

### **1.2.2 Natural vs. school bilingualism**

Besides age of a second language acquisition, it is necessary to differentiate whether an individual acquires the second language naturally or not. According to this criterion, two other types of bilingualism can be mentioned – ‘natural bilingualism’ and ‘school bilingualism’. The most significant difference between them is grounded in the context in which the child acquires the second language. Focusing on early bilingualism, there are two possible ways of becoming bilingual. A child can become bilingual either in a natural setting or in a structured setting; usually school (Bee Chin & Wigglesworth, 2007).

Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) first used the term ‘natural bilingualism’ to refer to “an individual who has learnt two languages without formal teaching in the course of her everyday life as her natural means of communication, and often learnt them relatively young” (p. 95). It means that natural bilingualism is not a consequence of a teaching or learning process. In this case, a child acquires both languages naturally, mainly within the family or thanks to other people around him or her. Infants are usually influenced by their parents and siblings but later a wider community can also have a big effect on a child (Bee Chin & Wigglesworth, 2007, p. 10).

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<sup>2</sup> For further information see chapter 1.1.3.

‘School Bilingualism’ refers to “the result of learning a foreign language at school by formal teaching and it implies that the learner has not had much opportunity, or indeed any, to use the language as a natural means of communication” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981, p. 95). It follows that a command of the second language is a result of some systematic or structured teaching and it is not a result of a natural process of acquiring a language.

### **1.2.3 Simultaneous vs. successive bilingualism**

The focus of this thesis is on natural language acquisition of bilingual children, therefore there will be no further information about school bilingualism, except that mentioned in previous chapter. Concentrating on natural bilingualism, it is necessary to distinguish a situation when a child acquires both languages at the same time from a situation where he/she acquires a mother tongue<sup>3</sup> at first and a second language later.

A term ‘simultaneous bilingualism’ involves children who acquire both languages simultaneously, which means at the same time. This is usually the case of bilingual families when the parents speak different languages. A child from such a family has actually two mother tongues. This type of bilingualism used to be called “Bilingual First Language Acquisition” (BFLA) (Meisel, 1994; Genesee, 2006; De Houwer, 2009). De Houwer (2009) interpreted this phenomenon as „the development of language in young children who hear two languages spoken to them from birth. BFLA children are learning two first languages”.

On the other hand, ‘successive bilingualism’ refers to a situation when a child acquires one language first and at an early age (between 3 and 6) learns the second language. Both languages are acquired spontaneously but the difference is that the second language is added at some stage after the first has begun to develop (Průcha,

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<sup>3</sup> Terms ‘mother tongue’ and ‘native language’ are used as synonyms in this thesis. Both of them refer to “language which a person acquires first in life, or identifies with as a member of an ethnic group” (Encyclopedia of Bilingualism, p.704).

2011, p. 163). This is usually that case when one language is spoken within the family and the other language is spoken within the community. According to Harding & Riley (1999), there are two typical reasons for successive bilingualism. The first one is a situation when „the family moves to a new country, usually for reasons connected with the parents' job, and the children therefore have to learn a new language“. The other reason is that the community speaks a different language from the family: „children whose parents speak a non-community language at home will learn their parents' language first, only starting on the community language later as their social contacts widen and in particular when they start going to playground or school“ (pp. 62-63).

Linguist Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) called that reason of natural bilingualism connected with the family “internal” and that one, which is related to the environment outside family “external-societal” (p. 95).

## **2. THE ACQUISITION OF TWO LANGUAGES FROM BIRTH**

### **2.1 The role of family setting**

If children acquire two languages simultaneously from birth, they will most likely hear them within the family. When concentrating on language development of bilingual children, one important fact has to be emphasized. The family is one of the key factors in children's development and parents play a substantial role in the process of socialization. The importance of family setting and the role that parents play in bilingual first language acquisition will be clarified in this chapter.

Everyone knows that when children are born, they are unable to speak. But what is really astonishing is their rapid progress. Language acquisition of bilingual children is very interesting. As they grow, they go "from not to speaking at all to speaking two languages" (Harding & Riley, 1999, p. 39). In the very first stage of development the family members, especially parents, are very important. Children learn to communicate with them through early interactions and acquire not only language itself but also ability to understand the world they live in (De Houwer, 2009).

In family setting children learn, among others, good manners, social rules and values and their naturally acquire the mother tongue and the norms for its use too (Šulová, 2004, pp. 121-122). Lanza (2001) stated, "All children, monolingual as well as bilingual, are socialized into community norms for language use and language choice through everyday interactions" (p. 201). Therefore, children need to be in contact with the family (principally with parents). It is the primary setting which they develop in.

### **2.2 Bilingual families and their language strategies**

When speaking of bilingual upbringing, the term 'bilingual family' has to be specified. It is quite difficult to give one suitable definition of this term because there are many different types of family settings and situations in which children grow up bilingually. "Each bilingual family is different, with its own patterns of language within the family and between the family and the local community" (Baker & Jones, 1998, p. 28).

Šulová (2004) pointed out that bilingual families can be divided either according to languages used by family members or according to relationship between the language of the family and the language of the community. The first criterion involves both families in which the parents have different mother tongues and families in which parents have the same mother tongues but other family members (grandparents or childcare providers) speak different language. The family in which the parents have different mother tongues but use just one of them to communicate with their children is also considered to be bilingual. The second criterion includes cases in which the community language is the same as the language of one parent from bilingual family, cases in which the community language is different from that of the parents, and situations where both the family and the community is bilingual using the same languages (pp. 149-150).

If the parents have different mother tongues, there are several ways of dealing with upbringing their children. Šulová & Bartanusz (2010) described three attitudes to family language which such parents can take :

- the whole family uses the father's language
- the whole family uses the mother's language
- both languages are used within the family (p. 200)

Children growing up in families where two different languages are spoken usually acquire both languages simultaneously. Bilingual first language acquisition generally takes the most common and successful form of bilingual upbringing called 'one person - one language' approach. Sometimes an 'intentional bilingualism' is applied too. Since focusing just on simultaneous language acquisition, the following chapter will be concentrated on these two approaches. However, there are several different strategies of bilingual upbringing except the above mentioned methods, so the whole typology will be mentioned at first.

Harding & Riley (1999) proposed the most often cited typology where five main types of bilingual families and their language strategies are described:

Type 1: 'One person - one language'

Parents: The parents have different native languages: each parent has some degree of competence in the other's language.

Community: The language of one of the parents is the dominant language of the community.

Strategy: The parents each speak their own language to the child from birth.

Type 2: 'One language – one environment'

Parents: The parents have different native languages.

Community: The language of one of the parents is the dominant language of the community.

Strategy: Both parents speak the non-dominant language to the child who is fully exposed to the dominant language when outside the home and particular when he/she starts nursery school.

Type 3: 'Non-dominant home language without community support'

Parents: The parents share the same native language.

Community: The dominant language is not that of the parents.

Strategy: The parents speak their own language to the child.

Type 4: 'Double non-dominant home language without community support'

Parents: The parents have different native languages.

Community: The dominant language is different from either of the parents' languages.

Strategy: The parents each speak their own language to the child from birth.

Type 5: 'Non-native parents' (Intentional bilingualism)

Parents: The parents share the same native language.

Community: The dominant language is the same as that of the parents.

Strategy: One of the parents always addresses the child in a language which is not his/her native language. (pp. 47-48)



Suzanne Romaine (as cited in Ball, 2005) mentioned another type of bilingual family:

Type 6: “Mixed languages”

Parents: The parents are bilingual.

Community: Sectors of community may also be bilingual.

Strategy: Parents code-switch and mix languages. (pp. 167-168)

It naturally depends on a particular situation of each family which strategy will be adopted within children’s bilingual raising. As stated in Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson (2005), “Children usually manage to adapt to whatever system the adults decide on, and can generally cope even with inconsistency in the long run” (p. 47).

### **2.3 Representative approaches to simultaneous language acquisition**

The most common approach to simultaneous language acquisition, often adopted by parents with different mother tongues, is ‘one person - one language’ strategy. Main features of this method will be specified in this chapter. However, children of monolingual parents can also acquire two languages from birth. This is the case of intentional bilingualism. This alternative approach will be also clarified here.

Susanne Döpke (1992) distinguished four typical cases of bilingual families in which children acquire both languages simultaneously. First two types concern parents with different native tongues and the other two types refer to monolingual parents who decided to raise their children bilingually. She described these patterns:

- 1) The parents have different native tongues, and the language spoken in the wider community is the same as that of one of the parents. Each parent speaks his/her own language to the child.
- 2) The parents have different native tongues, neither of which is spoken in the wider community. Each parent speaks his/her own language to the child.
- 3) Both parents are native speakers of the language spoken by the wider community. One parent chooses to speak a language other than his/her native language to the child.

- 4) Both parents are native speakers of the same minority language. One of the parents chooses to speak the language of the wider community to the child. (pp. 12-13)

To be more specific, some concrete examples of these patterns should be given. Döpke (1992) speaks about the above mentioned family types rather in general. However, it is not difficult to imagine some particular situations connected with Czech and English context. First type, for example, can be represented by Czech-speaking mother and English-speaking father living in the Czech Republic<sup>4</sup>. The second type can refer to Slovak-speaking mother and English-speaking father living in the Czech Republic. Third type can be illustrated by a situation when one of the Czech-speaking parents decides to speak English to the child which is not a native-language for him/her. The last type refers, for example, to Czech-speaking family living in England. One of the parents chooses to speak English to the child.

It is obvious that parents have to choose the language they will use to communicate with their child. Nevertheless, it is also important to decide which language the parents will speak to each other. Döpke (1992) proposed three possible ways of solving this problem:

- The parents speak the language of the wider community to each other.
- The parents speak one of the minority languages to each other.
- Each parent speaks the language they speak with the child when addressing each other. (pp. 12-13)

### **2.3.1 ‘One person - one language’ approach**

If parents share different native languages, they usually choose the strategy called ‘one person - one language’ (OPOL) approach. When it is put into practice, each person consistently speaks only one language to the child. In most cases it means that child’s

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<sup>4</sup> This is a case of the family described in the practical part of this thesis.

mother speaks one language and child's father speaks the other<sup>5</sup>. Through this method the child can easily associate the words of each language with the appropriate person (Bosemark).

The idea of 'one person - one language' strategy was first introduced by a French linguist, Maurice Grammont<sup>6</sup>, who considered this method to be one of the most effective path to bilingualism. He supposed that if each parent speaks to the child strictly in one language from birth, then the child will acquire both languages without mixing them. The language confusion will be reduced. This family strategy, sometimes called 'the Grammont formula', was successfully applied by Grammont's friend linguist Jules Ronjat, who decided to bring up his son Louis bilingually. He followed Grammont's advice to use the strategy that each language is represented by a different person and spoke to the child in French, while his wife always spoke German to him. Consequently, Louis really became perfectly bilingual (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004, pp. 1-2).

'One person - one language' approach seems to be a good choice in bilingual upbringing. In *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* (1998) this strategy is described as very effective way of achieving bilingualism (p. 30). A big advantage of this method is that for parents it is a natural way of raising their children bilingually. Grosjean (1982) emphasized, "It allows each parent to communicate with the child in his/her native language, thereby ensuring naturalness in communication while making the child bilingual" (p. 173). For parents it is very comfortable to communicate with their children in their mother tongues. Döpke (1992) said about this approach, "it fulfils needs of parents: the need to interact with their children naturally in the language they heard as children themselves" (p. 13).

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<sup>5</sup> There are many variations on the term 'one person-one language'. Sometimes, for example, a term 'one parent-one language' is used. It has to be said that children typically learn both languages from parents but on the other hand sometimes also caregiver or nanny takes the place of one parent in this strategy. When speaking of this approach, the word 'person' seems to be more appropriate in this terminology. For further information see Barron-Hauwaert, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> The idea was published in 1902 in a book called *Observations sur le langage des enfants* (Observations on Children's Language).

On the other hand, there are also some potential problems connected with OPOL strategy. First of all there is a danger that one of the languages will become dominant<sup>7</sup>. This is usually when one of the parents spends with the child more time than the other which is typical for families where the mother, for example, is on maternity leave and the father sees the child only in evenings and on weekends. As a consequence of this situation the child can be more active in one of the languages. This language disproportion will deepen if the more often spoken language is the same as that of the community<sup>8</sup> (Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 2005, p. 50). In opposite case the disproportion is not so significant. Julian Kitagawa (2011) mentioned, "If the person who spends the most time with the child speaks the language that is not the one used in the child's surrounding environment then things are balanced out a little". The language used in kindergarten or at school can also make one language stronger. The child uses just one of the languages here thereby he/she becomes naturally more active in this language (Harding-Esch & Riley, 2008, pp. 202-203).

What can help the child to use both languages in a balance way is to choose the minority language<sup>9</sup> as a language between parents and also between siblings if possible (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004, p. 6). Christina Bosemark, the founder of the Multilingual Children's Association, recommends some other tips for making the minority language more dominant. According to her, the child should be in contact with other children speaking minority language. Children learn from each other very naturally. The possible way of doing this is meeting with other bilingual families, for example on the playground. The child will realise that the parent is not the only person speaking that language. The family can also find a nanny speaking the language which has to be improved. Furthermore, the children can boost their more passive language skills though reading books, playing games, singing songs, watching videos and television, everything in less dominant language. To visit the country where the language is spoken is also very helpful.

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<sup>7</sup> Dominant language = a language which a person has greater proficiency in or uses more often.

<sup>8</sup> Language of the community or majority language = a high status language usually spoken by a majority of the population of a country.

<sup>9</sup> Minority language = a language of low prestige and low in power.

### 2.3.2 Intentional bilingualism

It was already mentioned that the parents speaking the same native language can also raise their children bilingually. Another possible way of bilingual first language acquisition, besides OPOL approach, is to adopt alternative method of so called 'artificial' or 'intentional bilingualism'.

Intentional bilingualism represents the situation in which conditions of natural bilingualism are imitated. A child acquires two languages naturally in a family, although one of these languages is not a native language of parents. The key condition for intentional bilingualism is an excellent language command on the part of parents (Bytešníková, 2007, p. 91). It means it is possible to raise the children bilingually by monolingual parents "if they feel competent and comfortable enough to do so" (Sander, 2009, p. 7).

The term 'intentional bilingualism' has been introduced quite recently by a Slovak Linguist Jozef Štefánik. In 1996 he and his colleagues suggested to replace the old word 'artificial', which had been used to refer to this particular type of bilingual upbringing for a long time, by more appropriate term 'intentional'. The old term had been used by reason that for many linguists imitating a natural situation is something artificial and they consider this method abnormal. However, number of linguists and researchers in bilingualism criticised a negative tone of the adjective 'artificial'. A German and Slovak linguist Jozef Pallay (as cited in Jiménez, 2010) said, "The term implies that the language education would lead to an artificial and ultimately undesirable final result" (p. 4). In his opinion, this type of bilingual education can be successful (Jiménez, 2010, p. 4).

The method of intentional bilingualism has been successfully implemented, for example, by an Australian linguist George Saunders, who managed to bring up his three children in German being a non-native language for him. On the basis of his personal experience he claimed:

For the child the situation in which a parent speaks with him or her in a foreign or a second language is not artificial, but completely normal and authentic, because the child does not know that this is a foreign language for his/her parents. (Jiménez, 2010, p. 4)

Parents practising this special type of bilingual upbringing are usually very motivated. They believe that bilingualism will be a great advantage for their children and suppose giving them a good level of a foreign language will have a positive effect on children's lives (Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 2005, p. 43).

## **2.4 Growing up with two cultures**

Both parents who decided to bring up their children intentionally, using the language which is non-native for both of them, and those who decided to raise them bilingually because of the fact they do not share the same mother tongue, will have to deal with a question of culture or cultures linked with the language.

According to Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson (2005), for parents it is more easy to give the children the command of two languages than the knowledge of two cultures. They stated, "While parents alone can give the children a second language, they will not be able to give them a second culture without the help of the others and the support of society" (p. 85). The plain fact is that the children will be more familiar with the culture associated with language of the community the family live in. Besides family setting, they learn the culture through playing with their friends, through school and various activities. As for minority language, the situation is not so easy. The parent who speaks the language which is not the same as that of the community has to make an effort to give the child the knowledge of that culture. This is more difficult if the family has no contact with other people who share the same cultural background. In such a situation some children's books, fairy tales, songs and rhymes or games can serve as a suitable device. Harding & Riley (1999) mention also television as a good source of information about particular culture. They claim:

The role of television as a provider of cultural information to the child can be very important: that is how french people sit at table, this is what English people eat for breakfast, now is the time of day when the Dutch have their evening meal, for example. (p. 143).

In families where intentional bilingualism is applied the situation is usually more difficult. For example, to celebrate English holidays and keep English traditions and customs within Czech family in which one of the parents decided to speak English to the child may seem artificial and unnatural. It is probably more natural to make frequent

trips to the country where the foreign language is spoken and familiarise the child with the culture of this country that way (Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 2005, pp. 85-86).

Some important issues concerning children who acquire two languages from birth were discussed. It was demonstrated that family plays a substantial role in children's lives not only because it is a primary setting of their language development. It was emphasized that each bilingual family is different with its own patterns of language within the family and between the family and the local community. This chapter also clarified that various strategies in bilingual upbringing can be adopted. Finally, it was explained that the language acquisition also refers to knowledge of two cultures associated with the languages.

### 3. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF BILINGUAL CHILDREN

This part of the thesis concentrates on typical features and stages of bilingual language development. First of all, it clarifies the process of bilingual first language acquisition from prenatal period through production of first sentences to language differentiation. Attention is paid especially to the question of how children learn to separate the two languages. Then some interesting issues connected with the language development and language use of bilinguals are described. These are foreign accent, ability to code-switch and literacy in both languages.

#### 3.1 Prenatal period

Early language development of both monolingual and bilingual children does not commence by the production of first syllables and words but starts as early as the children are in their mother's womb. Different studies<sup>10</sup> have shown that the foetus can already has the ability to hear in this period and responds to mother's voice and other sound stimulations. The prenatal period is thus an important part of language acquisition (Průcha, 2011).

Hearing two languages during the prenatal period can be a good preparation for next stages of development. It was demonstrated by psychological scientists Krista Byers-Heinlein and Janet F. Werker from the University of British Columbia along with Tracey Burns of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in France (as cited in Isanski, 2010) who conducted an experiment investigating "language preference and discrimination in newborns". They tested two groups of infants – those whose mothers used only one language during pregnancy and those, whose mothers regularly spoke two languages during pregnancy. The method called "high-amplitude sucking-preference procedure"<sup>11</sup> was chosen for testing. It proved that monolinguals

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<sup>10</sup> For further information see Průcha (2011, pp. 35-37). The summary of results of some recent studies concerning prenatal period is stated here.

<sup>11</sup> This method is based on observing the newborns' sucking reflex. Increased sucking indicates interest in a stimulus.



were more interested in that language they heard in prenatal period than in the language they have never heard before while bilingual newborns' preferences were equal for both languages. The results suggest that "prenatal bilingual exposure may affect infants' language preferences, preparing bilingual infants to listen to and learn about both of their native languages" (Isanski, 2010).

### **3.2 From infants to the production of first sentences**

As well as in prenatal period, the newborn babies are not able to speak yet but they are able to hear. Therefore, they absorb various sounds during the infant period. There are different speech and intonation patterns in each of the two languages which bilingual children have to learn to identify (De Houwer, 2009).

Initially, children can register, for example, a melody of sentence. According to De Houwer (2009), "Sentence melodies can signal different things, such as anger, a command, a statement or just where a sentence starts and stops" (Chapter 2). They can often vary in different languages.

When bilingual infants reach approximately the age of six months, they typically begin to babble. It means they start producing first sounds of language but they do not utter meaningful words yet. They usually babble in syllables which are repeated. The fact that bilingual children as well as monolingual ones avoid producing words (or syllables at first) with sounds difficult to pronounce was observed. It was noticed that they prefer producing those words that contain sounds easily to articulate. As stated in Harding & Riley (Harding & Riley, 1999), these are, for example, 'p', 'b', 'd', 'f', 'm' or 'n' (pp. 49-50).

Around the age of twelve months children start to produce their first real words. From the production of words they gradually go to combining of words into at first short and later longer sentences. This particular order in language development is followed either by monolingual children or bilingual children. However, there is one substantial difference between them. Since bilingual children have to cope with two languages, they usually produce utterances that combine elements of both languages. This mixing is considered to be a part of the process of language separation (De Houwer, 2009, Chapters 1,2).

### **3.3 Language separation**

The question of how bilingual children develop has been the subject of much debate of both linguists and psychologists. Since some mixing normally occurs in the communication of bilingual children, the question of language separation arises. There are two different attitudes towards the separation of the languages which have to be mentioned. These are ‘unitary language system hypothesis’ and ‘dual language system hypothesis’. Both hypotheses concerning language development of bilingual children are described in the following two chapters.

#### **3.3.1 Unitary language system hypothesis**

According to unitary language system hypothesis, children acquiring two languages simultaneously go through the initial stage where two languages are combined into one unified system and gradually become bilingual. This explanation was first proposed in 1978 by Virginia Volterra and Traute Taeschner and it is also stated in various publications (Grosjean, 1982; Harding & Riley, 1999; Šulová, 2004; Genesee, 2006, etc.). They claim that as the bilingual children develop, they go through three main phases of language development.

##### **3.3.1.1 Phase 1**

During the first phase of development the languages are not differentiated yet. The child has only one lexical system including words from both languages but he/she is unable to match the words into pairs. Vocabulary is limited and synonyms are not accepted at this stage. The child is able to say some word in one language but he/she does not usually manage to say its equivalent in the other language. Harding & Riley (1999) pointed out that “The child operates on a ‘one word for one concept principle’: either only one of the words in the pair is used or the two words are used with different meanings“ (p. 51).

Sometimes also production of “compounds” constructed from both languages can occur. It means the child uses words “made up of a pair of corresponding words from the two languages“ (Harding & Riley, 1999, p. 51). The compound “bitte-please”, used by German-English speaking girl, can serve as an example. Grosjean (1982) also gave several examples of this phenomenon. He mentioned the child can produce so called

“blends”. When a French-English bilingual boy, for example, wanted to tell someone to sit down, he used the word “assit” (from the French ‘assis’ and the English ‘sit’) (p. 184). According to Saunders (as cited in Šulová, 2004, p.153), this period can last approximately until the age of two.

### 3.3.1.2 Phase 2

During the second phase the child gradually begins to differentiate between lexicons of two languages but the same grammatical rules are applied to both of them (Grosjean, 1982, pp. 184-185). Eva Smith (2009) stated several examples of this phenomenon:

Podej mi ten *pinkový*. (Give me the pink one.)

- Czech grammatical rule was applied to English adjective ‘pink’.

Je to ve *frontu*. (It is in front.)

- Czech grammatical rule was applied to English adverb ‘in front’.

Babička *drinkuje* kafičko. (Grandma is drinking a coffee.)

- Czech grammatical rule was applied to English verb ‘to drink’.

Opička *klajmuje* na stromě. (Monkey is climbing the tree.)

- Czech grammatical rule was applied to English verb ‘to climb’.

Harding & Riley (1999) observed the children can simultaneously know a lot of words for which they do not know the equivalent in the other language. Therefore they often insert words from one language to the sentences in the other language and produce mixed utterances. Some concrete examples can be given:

*Mer paper* (More paper) - English/Norwegian (Grosjean, 1982, p. 11)

*Baloon vermel* (Red balloon) - Catalan/English (Grosjean, 1982, p. 11)

*More čaj* (More tea) - English/Czech (Smith, 2009)

Preferring words easy to pronounce can also occur during this phase:

‘*Bouton*’ (button) instead of ‘*Knopf*’ – German/French

(Harding & Riley, 1999, p. 52)

### 3.3.1.3 Phase 3

At the third stage of development the languages (both their vocabulary and grammar) become differentiated and there is a minimum of language interference. The child can be considered to be fully bilingual. He/she can easily associate the words of each language with the appropriate person (Harding & Riley, 1999, p. 53). Saunders said (as cited in Šulová, 2004, p 154), that the age at which the child is fully able to differentiate between two languages is ambiguous. Different children enter this stage at different age.

The hypothesis of undifferentiated language system was stated in many publications and seemed to be a satisfactory explanation of bilingual children's mixing which occur during their language development. However, the idea that bilingual children have just one language system at the initial stage of their language development was re-examined and disproved by current research. Nowadays the conception of two separate language systems is preferred.

### 3.3.2 Dual language system hypothesis

Dual language system hypothesis claims that the systems of both languages are separated from the beginning of bilingual child's language development. Although the child acquires two languages simultaneously, he/she keeps both languages separate. According to this conception, children are aware of synonyms, which means they know that both the word of one language and its equivalent in the other language belongs to the same concept (Genesee, 1989). For example, they are aware of the fact that both 'two' in English and 'dos' in Spanish refer to the number '2' (Simultaneous bilingualism).

This hypothesis was confirmed for example by Genesee, Nicoladis, & Paradis (1995) who examined language differentiation in bilingual children and found out that "while these children did code mix, they were clearly able to differentiate between their two languages" (Abstract).

### 3.4 Accent

Another feature of the language development of bilingual children may be a foreign accent in one of the languages which they acquire. If the child hears one of the languages more often than the other, the accent of this dominant language can occur in his/her minority language. For example “the child hears much more German than English and so speaks English with German accent” (Harding & Riley, 1999, p. 115). However, if children receive sufficient input from each of the languages, they will be able to communicate in both languages without any foreign accent. It usually requires more practice in the minority language.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that bilingual children often communicate in the minority language only with one person (typically with one of their parents) can cause some difficulties. Since they are used to his/her accent, melody, tempo and mode of expressing, when being in contact with other speakers they may naturally have a problem to understand them properly (Loudová & Poračanová, 2008). Therefore, it is very important for children to receive as much exposure as possible to the minority language. Harding & Riley (1999) emphasize, “What the child needs is exposure to widest possible range of accents, voices, genres, situations and functions of language” (pp. 142-143). There are several ways of improving the ability to understand. According to Harding & Riley (1999), the child can, for example, gain more experience from the television:

Television is ideally equipped to do this job, as a glance at a typical afternoon’s viewing will show: a do-it-yourself programme, news and weather forecast, gardeners’ question time, a pop song and a documentary on bees show what a very rich medium television can be. (p.142-143)

Nevertheless, having a foreign accent in one or both languages does not imply insufficient command of the language. According to Grosjean (2011), “There is no relationship between one's knowledge of a language and whether one has an accent in it”.

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<sup>12</sup> Ways of increasing its exposure was described in chapter 2.3.1.

### 3.5 Code-switching

In comparison with monolinguals, bilingual people have one unique skill which they can perform. It is ability to ‘code-switch’.

To be more specific, code-switching is “a change of language within a conversation, most often when bilinguals are in the company of other bilinguals” (Baker & Jones, 1998, p. 58). Li Wei (2000) offered a similar definition. She stated, “Code-switching is the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent” (p. 208)

Some people, especially monolinguals, may consider code-switching to be something negative. They may regard it as a lack of language proficiency or a sign of confusion. It is actually the other way round. Code-switching is always meaningful and it requires very good command of both languages. It has to be emphasized that the strategy of switching languages is not random. It is a systematic action which follows specific rules (Baker & Jones, 1998, p. 58).

Code-switching must not be mistaken for ‘mixing’. As mentioned in the previous chapter, mixing is a part of bilingual language development. It occurs in early developmental stages and precedes the language separation. Code-switching also does not refer to ‘language choice’ which means that “the speaker changes from one language to another according to the person he/she is speaking to” (Harding & Riley, 1999, p. 57). To give an example of the language choice, the situation described by Smith (2009) can be stated:

A bilingual boy, who is three years old, is leaving home:

To his Czech-speaking mother: *Mámo, pojďme!* (Mammy, let’s go!)

To his English-speaking father: *Daddy, let's go!*

A list of different kinds of code-switching was clearly presented by Harding & Riley (1999). They stated several common types of this phenomenon. Probably the most common type was define thusly :

Speaker cannot find the right word or expression in the language he/she is speaking, either because he/she simply cannot remember it or because the

language in question just does not seem to have a satisfactory way of expressing that particular idea, that is, there is not a word for it. (p. 58)

Furthermore, there is also so called ‘triggering’. It means “a word which is similar in both languages, or the name of a person, place or commercial product, makes the speaker continue in the second language” (p. 58). Bettoni (as cited in Clyne, 1991) stated the example of the triggering effect:

*Come che l’ha conosciuto su I film? Not in the films, are you, these pornographic films he gets in?*

(How he recognized him in the films? Not in the films, are you, these pornographic films he gets in?) (p. 194)

Besides the above mentioned types another way of code-switching can occur in the utterance of bilinguals. “When a bilingual child quotes in ‘direct speech’, he/she can, if he/she so wishes, attempt to convey not only the person’s voice quality and style of speech but also the words the person quoted actually used” (p. 58). Situation when the child is telling what the mother said (quoting her in French) and what the father said (quoting him in English) within one utterance can serve as an example.

They also described “switching as a marker of solidarity with the person they are talking to” (p. 59) In this case the change of languages indicates the close relation between speaker and interlocutor.

Bilingual children can also use the strategy of code-switching to “exclude someone from a conversation” (p. 59). It can be demonstrated by this example:

Emily is at table with her German friend Anne, and her parents. The common language is French.

Mother to Anne: *Tu reprendras un peu de ca?*  
(Would you like some more?)

Emily to her mother in Swedish: *Jag tror inte at thon tycker om det.*  
(I don’t think she likes it.)

Here, Emily was obviously trying to help her friend without embarrassing her. (p.59)

No it is obvious code-switching is not arbitrary and it is used with some purpose. It depends usually on social and psychological factors, rather than on linguistic factors.

### **3.6 Literacy**

While bilingual children learn to speak two languages simultaneously without great difficulty, reading and writing in two languages does not have to be so easy. Since these children usually learn to write and read at school where the community language is spoken, the question of how they can become literate also in the minority language arises.

Bilingual child often has better skills in the language of community. Therefore, parents usually help his/her become biliterate. Teaching the child to read in the minority language does not seem to be complicated. According to Harding & Riley (1999), parents should read to their children in both languages and let them follow the text as often as possible. However, it is necessary to separate the languages. Books of one language can be, for example, on different shelf than books of the other one. (pp. 134-135)

If there is a different alphabet and spelling in each of the two languages, it will be more difficult for the child to learn how to write in both of them. For many parents the accuracy of spelling in minority language is not so important. Nevertheless, bilingual children usually feel the need to have such language command in both languages. In this case, parents should also help to improve his/her written performance, especially in non-school language. Some activities, such as playing 'Hangman', 'Scrabble' or 'Boogle' can be very helpful. Children can also sign their drawings, give them some titles or add written explanations in minority language, thereby improving their writing and spelling skills. (Harding & Riley, 1999, pp. 137-138;147-148)



## **4. CASE STUDY**

### **4.1 Research design**

In this part of the thesis a case study was chosen as a research method. It has to be emphasized that the aim of this method is not to generalise the results of the research but to give a comprehensive description of one particular case (Hendl, 2005, pp. 104-105). The main purpose of the following chapters is:

- 1) To give a detailed portrait of a particular bilingual family which can help readership better understand the language development of bilingual children.
- 2) To answer the question: To what extent the children's language development corresponds to the peculiarities of bilingual language acquisition described in a theoretical part of the work?

The semi structured interview with Mrs Markéta, a mother of two children, with a framework of themes to be explored, was conducted in order to collect needed information.

### **4.2 Family profile**

Markéta and Joe are a Czech-English couple living in Prague. She works as a flight attendant and he is a pilot. Joe was born in the Czech Republic but when he was eleven, he and his father moved to Canada where they stayed for 22 years. Joe came to the Czech Republic in 1998. His Czech was bad and he spoke with a foreign accent. He still feels to be more American than Czech. Markéta is Czech but speaks also Italian and English. At the time she met Joe her English was not very advanced but during the life with Joe he became very fluent in this language. They have two sons, Michael Francis who is 7 years old and Joseph who is 8 years old. Both of them are being brought up as bilinguals.

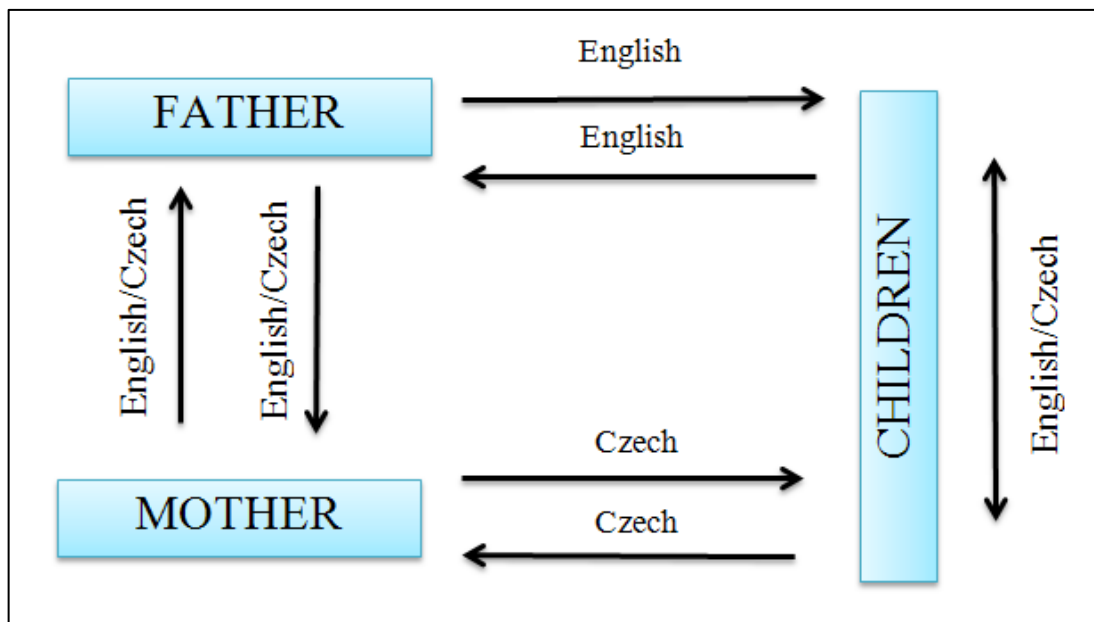
#### **4.2.1 Language strategy**

Before the children were born, the parents consciously decided to choose the strategy called 'one person - one language' to raise their children bilingually. In practice, the father and the mother converse both Czech and English when speaking

together. Apart from special occasions when one of the languages is preferred for social reasons, the parents consistently use their own language when addressing the children. The father always speaks in English to the children while the mother always speaks to them in Czech. The children keep Czech, occasionally English for communication between themselves.

The following diagram illustrates the language situation of the family. It shows:

- On the left the languages used by the parents together.
- Horizontally, the language used by the father and mother when addressing the children.
- On the right the languages used between the children.



**Diagram 1 – Language patterns**

The mother also considered using Italian in the children's upbringing. Nevertheless, she finally decided to speak her native language, although she speaks Italian quite well. It is more natural for her to address the children in her mother tongue. The family makes frequent trips to Italy, where Markéta's wider family and her friends live. Children thus have an opportunity to hear the Italian language.

Markéta admits that during her pregnancy she spent a lot of time searching various information about bilingual children and the language strategies used in bilingual upbringing. She is very interested in bilingualism and multilingualism itself.

#### 4.2.2 Language processing and performance

The boys speak both languages well, they have no trouble at all switching from one language to another and never mix their languages, although they have passed through an early phase when they did so. During this phase they produced some mixed utterances such as:

Daddie, please, *podej mi*.

I need *kakat*.

According to Markéta, the children were able to differentiate between two languages approximately at the age of five. They are now aware of synonyms which means they use English words as synonyms to the Czech words. They never use Czech declination in English sentences but occasionally they use English word order when speaking the Czech language.

When Markéta was on maternity leave, the children used to hear much more Czech than English and became naturally more dominant in the Czech language. During this period, the father could not communicate with the boys very often. Nevertheless, to increase the exposure of English the parents played records of English songs to them or read them some English stories. When being in Canada, Joe bought a lot of English books, board games, workbooks and colouring books there. Therefore, the children were also exposed to the English language through these materials.

Both children are doing well at school but Michael seems to be more proficient in both languages. He is interested in various languages as in English, Czech, Italian, and Slovak. He also wonders about sounds in Japanese or Polish. While Joseph does not have any foreign accent when speaking English and Czech, Michael speaks English with Czech accent occasionally. When Michael started attending school, he had a problem to understand his English teacher speaking in British English. Since he was used to his father's Canadian accent, when being in contact with the teacher speaking the British accent, he was not able to understand her properly.

The parents admit they are planning to move to Canada in the near future. However, they decided to wait because both boys do not know the Czech spelling and writing yet. Joseph has entered the first grade while Michael has entered the second class. Markéta has arranged with Joe to stabilise the spelling and reading abilities in one language at first and then introduce the children into the spelling of the second language.

At home the family mainly keep Czech traditions, but since the children were little they have spoken about various differences, too. For instance, the children still believe in "Baby Jesus", but are aware of the fact that there is Santa Claus giving presents in the USA and Canada. Both of them know what Thanksgiving means and they also celebrate Halloween. The children sometimes ask the parents questions regarding Italian traditions and are informed about the start of summer holidays both in Canada and Italy.

### **4.3 Interpretation**

#### **4.3.1 Language strategy**

The family uses the 'one person - one language' strategy which is the most common approach to simultaneous language acquisition, often adopted by parents with different mother tongues. In this case the parents decided to use their native languages as well, although Markéta was considered raising the children intentionally – speaking to them in Italian. Both children acquire two languages naturally from birth, within the family setting.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4.3.2 Language processing and performance**

Both Joseph and Michael followed the common order in language development. They went through the initial stage where some mixing occurred but gradually became

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<sup>13</sup> For further information see Chapters 2.2 and 2.3.

bilingual. They now have the ability to code-switch and fully communicate in both languages.<sup>14</sup>

As the father was away from home for most of the time and both children went to a Czech nursery school and later started attending Czech elementary school, the quality of their English had seriously decline. However, the parents provided the children sufficient input of both languages, thereby improving the minority language. As mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, the dominance of one of the languages (mostly of the language of community) is one of the problems connected with ‘one person - one language’ strategy. However, there are many ways of encouraging the children in using the less active language.<sup>15</sup>

A typical problem connected with a foreign accent also occurred during the children’s development. The fact that Michael often used the minority language to communicate only with one person (his father) caused some difficulties in understanding other people speaking the same language but different accent.<sup>16</sup>

As well as other bilingual families, this family is also somehow tries to cope with problem concerning literacy in both languages.<sup>17</sup>

From the description of the family it is obvious that the parents give the children not only the command of two languages but also the knowledge of two cultures. Keeping the tradition associated with the language and speaking about cultural differences is a good source of information about particular cultures.<sup>18</sup>

The research proved that certain features of the examined family really correspond to the process of language development as it is commonly described in literature.

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<sup>14</sup> For further information see Chapters 3.1 - 3.3.

<sup>15</sup> For further information see Chapter 2.3.

<sup>16</sup> For further information see Chapter 3.4.

<sup>17</sup> For further information see Chapter 3.6.

<sup>18</sup> For further information see Chapter 2.4.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that the aims set at the beginning of this work have been achieved. The purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate the fact that the process of bilingual first language acquisition shows some common features that set bilinguals apart from monolinguals in an interesting way. The language development of bilingual children was described in the theoretical part of the work.

To be more specific, in the first part of the thesis some important issues concerning children who acquire two languages from birth were discussed. It was demonstrated that family plays a substantial role in children's lives not only because it is a primary setting of their language development. It was emphasized that each bilingual family is different with its own patterns of language within the family and between the family and the local community. It was also clarified that various strategies in bilingual upbringing can be adopted. Finally, it was explained that the language acquisition also refers to knowledge of two cultures associated with the languages.

A number of interesting points was also presented in the second part of the work. It was concentrated on typical features and stages of bilingual language development. First of all, the process of bilingual first language acquisition from prenatal period through production of first sentences to language differentiation was explained. Attention was paid especially to the question of how children learn to separate the two languages. Then some interesting issues connected with the language development and language use of bilinguals were described. These were a foreign accent, ability to code-switch and literacy in both languages.

Another aim of this thesis was to give a detailed portrait of a particular bilingual family and analyse to what extent the children's language development corresponds to the peculiarities of bilingual first language acquisition described in the theoretical part of the work. This aim was fulfilled in the practical part of the thesis by conducting the case study concerning the Czech-English family. The research proved that certain features of the examined family really correspond to the process of language development as it is commonly described in literature.

## APPENDIX

Type of Bilingual	Definition
Additive Bilingual	An individual whose two languages combine in a complementary and enriching fashion.
Ascendant Bilingual	An individual whose ability to function in a second language is developing due to increased use.
Balanced Bilingual (equilingual) (symmetrical bilingual) (ambilingual)	An individual whose mastery of two languages is roughly equivalent.
Compound Bilingual	An individual whose two languages are learnt at the same time, often in the same context.
Co-ordinate Bilingual	An individual whose two languages are learnt in distinctively separate contexts.
Covert Bilingual	An individual who conceals his or her knowledge of a given language due to an attitudinal disposition.
Diagonal Bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in a non-standard language or a dialect in an unrelated standard language.
Dominant Bilingual	An individual with greater proficiency in one of his or her languages and uses it significantly more than the other language(s).
Dormant Bilingual	An individual who has emigrated to a foreign country for a considerable period of time and has little opportunity to keep the first language actively in use.
Early Bilingual (Ascribed Bilingual)	An individual who has acquired two languages early in childhood
Functional Bilingual	An individual who can operate in two languages with or without full fluency for the task in hand.
Horizontal bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in two distinct languages which have a similar or equal status.
Incipient Bilingual	An individual at the early stages of bilingualism where one language is not fully developed.
Late Bilingual (achieved bilingual)	An individual who has become a bilingual later than childhood.
Maximal Bilingual	An individual with near native control of two or more languages.
Minimal Bilingual	An individual with only a few words and phrases in a second language.
Natural Bilingual (primary bilingual)	An individual who has not undergone any specific training and who is often not in position to translate or interpret with facility between two languages.
Productive Bilingual	An individual who not only understands but also speaks and possibly writes in two or more languages.
Receptive Bilingual (semibilingual) (asymmetrical bilingual) (passive bilingual)	An individual who understands a second language, in either its spoken or written form, or both, but does not necessarily speak or write it.
Recessive Bilingual	An individual who begins to feel some difficulty in either understanding or expressing him or herself with ease, due to lack of use.
Secondary Bilingual	An individual whose second language has been added to a first language via instruction.
Semilingual	An individual with insufficient knowledge of either language.
Simultaneous bilingual	An individual whose two languages are present from the onset of speech.
Subordinate bilingual	An individual who exhibits interference in his or her language usage by reducing the patterns of the second language to those of the first.
Subtractive bilingual	An individual whose second language is acquired at the expense of the aptitudes already acquired in the first language.
Successive bilingual (consecutive bilingual)	An individual whose second language is added at some stage after the first has begun to develop.
Vertical bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in a standard language and a distinct but related language or dialect.

Table 1

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## SHRNUTÍ

Tato práce se zabývá jazykovým vývojem bilingvních dětí, přičemž je zaměřena především na simultánní osvojování si obou jazyků v přirozeném prostředí, zejména v rámci rodiny. Hlavním cílem práce je objasnit proces jazykového vývoje, během kterého se děti stávají bilingvními jedinci a popsat určitého jeho rysy, které tyto děti odlišují od dětí monolingvních. Praktická část práce obsahuje případovou studii česko-anglické rodiny, v níž jsou děti vychovávány za použití strategie jeden člověk-jeden jazyk. Její detailní popis má poskytnout hlubší vhled do tematiky bilingvismu a ilustrovat problematiku popsanou v části teoretické.