

An Examination on the Most Important Factors in Raising a Bilingual Child

As part A of the SLA'S Assignment 1

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the advance of globalization and intercultural communication, raising a bilingual child has become a focus, a prospect and even a necessity of parents dwelling in this earth village. When it comes to bilingualism, a category belonging to the field of second language acquisition, a plenty of researchers studying second language acquisition have surveyed and presented their findings or fruits in a form of reports, articles, journals essays or books, among which Colin Baker is a great contributor. The main purpose of this report is to examine critically Colin Baker's answers to the question that what the most factors in raising a bilingual child are, to discuss with evidence whether his advice given in his book matches our experience and seems relevant and then to prepare this for the part B, the advice part, to chiefly give parents some objective, practical and justified advice on the most important factors in raising a bilingual child.

BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION

Surveys on bilingual child within second language acquisition field bear abundant fruit. Especially, Colin Baker(2014) in his book *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism* says he has published 14 books and over 100 other publications on this subject, which means as an individual he is the most productive author.

While using the two words *bilingual child* as key words and searching in the website JSTOR a part of ITHAKA and a not-for-profit organization helping the academic community use digital technologies to preserve the scholarly record and to advance research and teaching in sustainable ways, I get altogether 43, 469 academic content results with 29, 953 journals, 13, 413 book chapters and 103 research reports. These serve as handy and objective resources that can be used to compare theories of raising a bilingual child with that of Colin Baker.

DISCUSSION

On the most important factors in raising a bilingual child, Colin Baker(2014) derives two most important factors in raising a bilingual child. One is that the most important factor in raising a bilingual child is to make children's language development a pleasure, a positive and enjoyable experience in contrast to correctness of grammar, accuracy of vocabulary, distinction of two languages and adept in interpretation or translation. In view of his this theory or point of view, at first glance, I quite agree with his opinion because happy education is a term I spotted after reading some relevant articles put forward by some linguistics like Chomsky(2012). However, as a father of a 5 years old boy and also an English teacher of a high school, on further reflection, I choose to stand on a high land of objectiveness with critical thought.

First of all, the author Colin Baker just answers the posed question, that is, "What are the most important factors in raising a bilingual child?" in his book's Section B1 part and there are no relevant specific examples, practical experiments or quotes of other justifications, which make this perspective subjective and unconvincing.

What is more, in his same book's Section A10 part, Colin Baker requires parents to establish a richness of language experience, to develop a wider and deeper vocabulary, to stress the appropriate use of language in different situations and even to enhance pronunciation and accuracy of grammatical structure. Though he then emphasizes these mentioned above should be conducted

as a pleasurable participation, I can hardly imagine a pleasant journey with so many rules and requirements embedded in. What is worth mentioning is that in his B1 part he uses a word “*Instead*” to form a contradiction between the correctness of grammar, the accuracy of vocabulary and so on with his theory of a pleasant, positive and enjoyable second language learning experience. In this case, I observe that Colin Baker’s theory in B2 part is pretty contradictory to his theory in A10 part.

Moreover, there are theories focus on second language acquisition input itself, whether it is through a pleasant, positive and enjoyable second language learning experience or not. For instance, Stephen Krashen(1986) in his Input Hypothesis theory suggests that comprehensive input alone is essential to second language acquisition. And Mohammed Jasim Betti(2021) tells us the primary factor of driving second language acquisition seems to be the input language learners receive.

Last but not least, assuming input itself as a primary factor sounds indeed more grounded and earthly than Colin Baker’s pleasant experience one, which also matches my own experience of second language teaching and second language child raising. The school I am working is a boarding school where students are not able to go home every single day, which makes teacher-student relationship resemble parent-child relationship. Students here are born Chinese and English is their second language which they learn every day and we teach every day. There are three kinds of English teachers and by observing, comparing and evaluating their second language teaching performances or achievements we may reasonably derive a practical and objective conclusion from it on a basis of a true and ongoing teaching experience which can also function as an outcome of a survey that bystanders can not conduct. Teacher A, Xiaoman Wang is an old woman who emphasizes students’ input strictly and makes students do grammar exercises with a huge amount and her class is always dull and boring, which often makes most of her students a lot of complaint. Teacher B, Chenyu Lei is an handsome young man who values the close relationship with his students and thus creating a kind of democratic and enjoyable class atmosphere, which invites many students to challenge his authority and give a discount of his input tasks or exercises. Teacher C, Zhongxi Ye is a middle-aged and experienced teacher who insists on inputting second language vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and writing patterns and also tries every possible means to make his class efficient , humorous and enjoyable. Now let us take a look at their teaching effectiveness or performances in the chart below.

Three Teachers’ Results		
Teacher’s Name	Time	Class Average Score in Each Monthly Exam
Xiaoman Wang	Sep. to Jan.	113.9/ 113.85/ 98.5/ 115.3/ 114.9
Chenyu Lei	Sep. to Jan.	108.7/ 107.82/ 94.2/ 110.6/ 109.5
Zhongxi Ye	Sep. to Jan.	116.2/ 112.73/ 99.7/ 117.2/ 115.2

As is shown in the chart above, Xiaoman Wang’s strict input class gets better scores than Chenyu Lei’s enjoyable class and Zhongxi Ye’s class which ingrates input with joy gets relatively highest results, though in October the score is lower than that of Xiaoman Wang. The statistics show that in teaching second language we can not just focus on developing a pleasant, positive and enjoyable learning experience since second language input is the key to better learning or more efficient second language acquisition. So does the situation of parent’s raising a bilingual child.

My another in-person experience is that I am now raising a five-year-old child and teaching him English as a second language myself. Seldom do I pay attention to the pleasure of my teaching. I just keep inputting some words or sayings and doing correction in a real life context. For instance, for the first time, when we are going to eat apples, I teach him the word apple and if he repeats the word apple correctly he will get the apple to eat. When it is a third time, I input the saying related to the word apple "An apple a day keeps doctors away" for several times and to my amazement each time my child is going to eat an apple he spontaneously repeats the saying to me, which makes me feel that keeping inputting in a real life context is useful and powerful regardless of his being happy or not.

Based on above I hold the belief that one of the most important factors in raising a bilingual child is second language input itself but Colin Baker's pleasure theory. Rod Ellis (2016) in his book *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* also tells us this truth that it is self-evident that second language acquisition can take place only when the learner is accessible to the second language input.

Colin Baker (2014)'s another most important factor in raising a bilingual child is the language that surrounds language. The language that surrounds language indicates that a language atmosphere or setting is important. As a matter of fact, in terms of bilingual child raising, language that surrounds language means there are two languages or dual language that surround one another. In the study of childhood bilingualism the well-known OPOL approach just concentrates on the creation of the bilingual atmosphere. Barron-Hauwaert (2004) defines the OPOL approach as an approach that one parent speaks one language to the child and the other parent speaks a different language to the child simultaneously. The frequently mentioned term immersion education is also intended to seek perfect second language environment. It is worthwhile to mention that Christian, D. (1996) in his book *Two-Way Immersion Education: Students Learning through Two Languages* says that the two-way immersion education programs are attracting attention as an effective way to educate both language minority and majority status.

From where I stand, Colin Baker's this factor theory fairly matches my own second language acquisition experience and makes me aware of the authentic, effective and positive influence of a language environment. In my hometown city there are several Chinese dialects. The dialect I speak is my native dialect and later I moved from my town to the city's downtown area where another dialect is spoken. For quite a long time about 3 years I lived in the downtown and heard people speaking my second language dialect every day. I underwent the period of not knowing what they said to understanding what they were talking about and finally to fluently speaking my second language dialect, during which I made no purposeful learning of the second language dialect but just kept listening and trying to speak. It is definitely the language immersion or language environment and the language input that make me acquire the second language dialect successfully.

Conclusion

By examining Colin Baker's the most important factors and matching them with my own experience, I choose not to agree with his first theory because pleasure is too subjective to control and switch it to success of the second language acquisition and input is objective and necessary in terms of language acquisition and the second language acquisition. I quite agree with Colin Baker's second theory in that language immersion or atmosphere is influential and directly contributes to language efficient input.

References

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Advice to Parents on the Most Important Factors in Raising a Bilingual Child

As Part B of the SLA'S Assignment 1

Giving parents advice on the most important factors in raising a bilingual child is in fact a systematic matter because several issues require to be made clear or dealt with before giving reasonable, practical and grounded advice.

The first issue is the issue towards the goal of raising a bilingual child, so first of all we have to make clear the term “bilingual” or “bilingualism” and to what extent can we say that we reach the target of bilingualism or being a bilingual child. Versteegh, K.(2014) tells us that in the original version of Ferguson’s model the term “bilingualism” refers to the coexistence of two unrelated languages within one speech community and in more recent literature, ‘bilingualism’ is used as a psycho-linguistic term which refers to a speaker’s proficiency in two or more languages. Therefore, in view of this definition we are made clear that the goal of raising a bilingual child is raising a child who is capable of commanding two or more languages proficiently.

Since the advice is given to parents and parents vary from person to person, we have to view things from a parent’s perspective and also we can not give different parents the same advice. So naturally we cannot avoid the second issue of classifying parents. That is to say , we have to consider different parents’ specific condition or status and try to give different parents different advice. In fact, Colin Baker(2014) in his book A Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism has already mentioned some different types of parents. By combing through Colin Baker’s book I list and conclude the different kinds of parents in the following table.

Table of Different Types of Parents in Colin Baker’s Book

Serial Number(S/N)	Types	Source Number
Parents 1	Parents with one parent one language(OPOL) priority	A2
Parents 2	Parents in an extended family with disapproval of bilingualism	A6
Parents 3	One-parent(father-child or mother-child) family	A8
Parents 4	Neither of the parents speaks a second language	A9
Parents 5	Parents moving to a different country	A17
Parents 6	Parents of an adopted child	A18
Parents 7	Parents who regularly move to different countries	E26
Parents 8	Parents with a deaf child	F8

The third issue is undoubtedly about some important factors in raising a bilingual child because we are first of all necessary to get a macro view or a general scope of all possible important factors before we then decide on or recognize what are the most important factors among possible important factors. Concerning most important factors Colin Baker(2014) in his book A Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism gives us answers , which are making children’s language development a pleasure, a positive and enjoyable experience and the language that surrounds language. Stephen Krashen(1986) in his Input Hypothesis theory suggests that comprehensive input alone is essential to second language acquisition. And Mohammed Jasim Betti(2021) tells us the primary factor of driving second language acquisition seems to be the input language learners receive, with which I quite agree. Also Colin Baker(2017) in his another book Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism(the 6th edition) concludes totally thirty specific items encouraging second language maintenance under the categories of political, social and demographic factors, cultural factors and linguistic factors. Colin Baker (2017) also highlights

the age factor which is also known as the theory of the **critical period hypothesis** that indicates younger children have biological cognitive advantages for second language learning.

After taking all the above issues into consideration, I now give parents advice on the most important factors in raising a bilingual child. First of all, my advice is that for all parents we have to pay attention to one most important factor, the age or critical period factor. Though there exists disputes, we had better believe that we grasp the golden time of learning a second language at the age of three to seven in case we miss that time because our children can not afford to miss it. Secondly, my advice is that second language environment or the language surrounding language is undoubtedly another most important factor. Parents who have the qualification to conduct OPOL approach just persist doing that. Parents who are not able to speak the second language are advised to take their children to second language courses or schools or environment of second language. Thirdly, parents of all special situations are advised to focus on one important factor in raising a bilingual child, that is, the input factor. If parents can not do the input job, just let the second language school do it.

All in all, critical period factor, environment factor and the input factor are the three most important factors in raising a bilingual child.

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