

SLA1(2207783)

by Na Xiang

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A. Does switching between two languages have any value or purpose?

**A DISCUSSION ON THE PURPOSE AND VALUE OF
SWITCHING BETWEEN TWO LANGUAGES**

Na Xiang (2207783)

It's a common phenomenon that bilingual children switch between two languages occasionally. Some parents worried that switching was harmful because it's due to the lack of proper words or expressions in communication which would hinder their children's bilingual development. The essay intends to discuss whether there is a purpose or value in switching between two languages based on Colin Baker's point of view in his book "A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism" (2014)

Bilingual children often switching between two or more languages in the conversation. According to Baker (2014), it can occur in speeches, between sentences, or within sentences. In some research, two different terms are used to refer to switching between two languages: code-mixing and code-switching. Code mixing referred to unconscious alteration between two languages when some young bilingual learners or bilingual babies are not conscious of which language they are using and therefore either language would be used interchangeably. On the other hand, code-

switching was the conscious change of languages when bilingual individuals separated their two languages. Some scholars employed the term “translanguaging” because they thought there was no clear distinction between code-mixing and code-switching. Baker (2014) implies the distinction between code-mixing and code-switching is considered unhelpful by many because evidence shows bilingual children as young as two years old can distinguish between various languages and understand when to use each language in different social settings.

According to Bullock and Almeida (2009), code-switching (CS) refers to the remarkable skill that bilinguals possess, which allows them to easily switch between two languages. However, they implied that it could be difficult to define code-switching due to its complexity and the variety of situations it involves. The switching from one language to another language may involve bilingual individuals with different language proficiencies on various occasions. Moreover, there're various reasons for code-switching such as making up linguistic gaps, asserting the ethnic identity of speakers, accomplishing specific discourse goals, etc. Consequently, there're different interpretations of code-switching in literature. In this essay, code-switching is employed to simply refer to the phenomenon that young bilingual children change from one language to another language in their communication without judgement or making a distinction between code-switching or codemixing.

For a long time, code-switching was viewed as a failure to distinguish between the two languages used in speech. Furthermore, researchers themselves believed that code-switching lacked systematic structure for a considerable time (Cantone, 2007, p.53).

However, Colin Baker suggested that there were positive purposes for switching between two languages, which served as a communicative strategy. “Very early on, young children know which language to speak to whom in what situation” (Baker, 2014: 75). In contrast to unconscious mixing due to the incompetence to distinguish languages in their minds, bilingual children usually employed the strategy of code-switching deliberately. They may make several inappropriate switching but they could soon develop the ability to recognize when it is proper to code-switch based on contexts and people involved after a few attempts. Code-switching can be affected by a range of factors including the perceived language proficiency of speakers involved, familiarity with the subject matter, and the roles and status of people involved in the communication. As Colin Baker figured out, “there is usually considerable reason and logic in changing languages” (Baker 2014, p.75). For example, bilingual children usually only switch languages when they are speaking with individuals who understand both languages.  5

Then what are the purposes of code-switching? Colin Baker illustrated 10 main purposes of code-switching, including emphasizing or

reinforcing a particular point; replacing a word or phrase in another language when there is no equivalent; expressing an idea; explaining a phrase or command; communicating friendship and identity; reporting a conversation held previously; interjecting into a conversation; easing tension and injecting humor; indicating social distance, and excluding people from a conversation (2014, p.76). Changing the languages used in the conversation is not a sole language issue. It may indicate the change in social or power dynamics of the conversation. For example, we may use Mandarin in China to discuss work-related issues with colleagues and then change it to dialects to show intimacy when we turn to some private topics in the same conversation with the same people. Moreover, code-switching would be treated differently when the speakers' roles differ. For example, as an EFL teacher who taught English to adult students in a Chinese classroom, I sometimes switched from English to Chinese to emphasize some instructions or to explain the command. Students would welcome the code-switching because it would improve teaching efficiency, making instructions easy to understand and saving time. However, when EFL students switched from English to Chinese in answering a question, the action may not be welcomed by most English teachers because it may be regarded as a lack of vocabulary or language competence. As Baker said (2014, p.77), "code-switching is not just linguistic; it indicates important social and power relationships." The use of code-switching by EFL

teachers is commonly accepted in the classroom, as it is viewed as an effective strategy for enhancing teaching efficiency. Code-switching is employed as assistance and students would not doubt the code-switching is due to inadequate knowledge of their EFL teacher. While code-switching by EFL students may not be regarded as favourable, as it could be perceived as a sign of inadequate language proficiency or a lack of effort in practising English during classroom activities. On the other hand, on the same occasion, the code-switching of EFL teachers may not be so favourable by their directors or supervisors because it would be regarded as an action disrupting the English immersion environment. Therefore, code-switching is not a sole issue of language. It would be evaluated differently depending on the context and people involved.

Then, shall we encourage or discourage code-switching for bilingual children? For most parents of bilingual children, it would mainly depend on whether there are benefits of code-switching in children's language development.

As Baker mentioned, "monolinguals who hear bilinguals codeswitch may believe that it shows a deficit, or a lack of competence in both languages." (Baker, 2014, p. 76). Many parents of bilingual children also discourage code-switching in their children's communication because they believe that it may hinder their children's willingness to learn a second language, resulting in fewer opportunities to practice. I used to do so when

my son tried to switch from English to Chinese occasionally in our English communication.  8

In his book, Baker (2014) asserts the value of code-switching by bilingual children in their communication. He views code-switching as a “valuable and purposeful communication strategy” rather than an inadequate knowledge of a second language. (Baker, 2014, p. 76) and code-switching would facilitate bilingual children with the ability to adapt the changes in communication depending on different contexts and people with different roles and the ability to judge when to switch from one language to another appropriately (in the right occasion and to the right person).

Genesee (2015) also confirms the significance of code-switching of bilingual children. As he indicates, in recent studies, code-switching has been viewed by many researchers as a sign of linguistic and communicative competence rather than a sign of confusion and lack of competence in early views on code-mixing among bilingual children. Studies show that bilingual children can effectively use both their languages, and adapt their language use according to the language abilities and preferences of the speakers involved, even with unfamiliar speakers.

As a parent of a bilingual child, one of the most worrying things for me is whether children would mix their two languages in their minds and if they cannot develop both languages perfectly by switching from one

language to another one. I used to worry about the problem that my son would use English and Chinese interchangeably. For a long period, the mixed use of words or expressions were discouraged in my family. I often said “English Only” when we communicated in English. However, the effect is not as good as I assumed. One day I observed an online class when he communicated with his British teacher. To my surprise, he never used Chinese in class. When he mentioned some words that he didn’t know he would use his body language or draw pictures or use some other words in an attempt to describe the target words. At that time, I thought it was due to the work of his British teacher so I bought more online lessons to encourage him to speak more in English. Now I have a different understanding of the issue and feel less worried about the code-switching of my son with Colin Baker’s explanations. Therefore, I think it’s beneficial for bilingual children’s parents to reevaluate the purpose and value of code-switching.  9

Based on the papers and books reviewed it could be learnt that code-switching is valuable for bilingual children and it should not be regarded as a deficient behaviour or an alternative due to a lack of proper words or disability in one language. Instead, it’s a beneficial strategy and should be encouraged by parents of bilingual children. The code-switching was a deliberate choice. Bilingual children may do code-switching based on their preferences on different occasions and with different people. It should be

regarded as a communicative competence which could facilitate the children to adapt to the changes in the conversation. Consequently, encouraging code-switching will not block the development of language proficiency but enable bilingual children to enhance their communicative competence. It would greatly ease the anxiety of the parents and be accepted more easily by parents if code-switching is regarded as a communicative strategy rather than a sole language issue due to the incompetence of a second language.



B. What are the most important factors in raising a bilingual child?

ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF BILINGUAL CHILDREN

In his book, Colin Baker used a metaphor to illustrate the relationships between parents and children's language development. "The parent as language gardener can help maximize those conditions that are open to influence, but parents cannot control the growth of language" (2014, p.38). It implied that the priority for parents of bilingual children was to provide essential conditions for their children and what they cannot do is to control or interfere with the process of language development itself. According to Colin Baker, "Language growth in children requires the minimum of pruning— these are tender, young plants" (2014, p.38). He implies that constant correcting mistakes or repeating as enhancement are negative for language development and are not helpful. What the children needed the "a stimulating soil – a variety of pleasurable environments for language growth" (2014, p.38). Baker suggests encouragement from parents is a most important thing, which can bringing "a pleasure, a positive and enjoyable experience" to children, promoting their interests toward the language and the culture (2014, p.38). Also, encouragement would create a favorable environment for children to learn the language where they would feel less stressed and anxious. It enables children to realize their advantages in languages and cultures as bilingual individuals. If the

children have adequate knowledge of the target language and its culture, their cultural identity would be reinforced. The identity will encourage them to learn more about the language and culture. Two pieces of advice were given which include continuous encouragement and adequate exposure to both languages.

Background reading

Then I would like to give my suggestions based on my own experience as a parent of a bilingual child.

First of all, it would be better if parents could speak to the child in both languages as possible as they can if they wish to raise a bilingual child. As Colin Baker mentioned, the language used in the family and society would influence the children's motivation and attitude towards the languages and the cultures of those languages. Parents are the primary role models for their children in the family. Their behaviors and their languages in the family would be imitated by their children. Moreover, parents' attitudes towards the language will influence the child unconsciously. Parents choices are more effective in shaping children's value of a language than explicit instructions in the classrooms. If parents can speak both languages, children would have more favourable attitudes towards the language and its culture even without favorable language contexts. Also, positive attitudes towards both languages could be enhanced by activities in family life, such as travelling or getting involved in the cultural activities related to both languages. Furthermore, the interaction between the parents

and the children would create the communicative need. The interaction provides opportunities for the children to use the language, testing their guess of the meaning, trying and adjusting their strategies in the communication. [Bilingualism research](#)

Then, positive feedback and patience are important. As Colin Baker suggests, “a most important factor in raising a bilingual child is the language that surrounds language” (2014, p.38). Different from adults, children would be more easily motivated by encouragement which will promote their learning efficiency and bring enjoyable learning experiences. Positive feedback can also promote their interest towards the cultures involved. For example, children are willing to speak more or get involved in activities if they received positive feedback. Once my son gave up singing English songs when he was laughed at by other boys in the kindergarten. But he regained his interest in singing English songs soon after he was praised by his teacher publicly. Learning a language takes time, so parents should be patient, providing constant encouragement to children especially in their children’s “silent period”, when they do practice and self-correcting secretly.

Moreover, contrary to a simple wordlist, picture books, videos, and other visual aids in both languages would provide engaging experiences, helping children learn and reinforce new words. As Colin Baker indicates, the enjoyable experience would motivate the children to learn more.

As for the issue of the age of learning, it's beneficial to become bilingual early if family could provide sufficient support and resources but it would be never too late to start learning a language. According to Colin Baker (2001) younger children would feel less stressed and anxious in learning a language. Children usually enjoy some advantages over adults such as fewer inhibitions and it's generally agreed that "young children are more likely to attain native-like proficiency in a second language than are teenagers or adults", though there's no clear and satisfactory explanation for the phenomenon (Gass and Selinker, 2009, p.412). It's good to start learning both languages early if it is possible. However, learners would have other advantages if they start later such as learning capacity, analytic ability and pragmatic skills (Saville-Troike, 2006, p.82). Therefore, there's no need for parents to be anxious about the age issue. application of theory.

All in all, raising a bilingual child may require commitment, persistence and patience from parents. Language growth is "tender and slow" and what parents can do is provide essential conditions and wait for the rewards of being bilingual which are numerous and long-lasting (Baker, 2014, p. 38).  12

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FINAL GRADE

78/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

This is an excellent discussion of what the general bilingualism effects are and you have consistently referred to your own experience to support the points you make, which makes for interesting and relevant reading.

Part Two of the assignment is well covered and well expressed.

This is a very competent discussion of how parents can help their children as well as what they should know.

What would have improved your report is the use of a voice speaking directly to parents, as well as the use of bullet points, numbering, section subtitles, and Bold print to highlight the important information - the reasons, the benefits, the positive effects.

Some or many parents may need convincing. How could you have presented for instance the skills in creativity and communication that bilingualism brings in order to appeal to parents and convince them of the advantages of bilingualism?

The point you make about belonging is a good one - real life examples that people can relate realistically to are always going to

be stronger and more attractive.

However, what you present here is all valid, relevant and very useful. It is also extremely well organised and well expressed.

Well done.

PAGE 1



Comment 1

Excellent, clear overview of the main issues.



Comment 2

switch

PAGE 2



Comment 3

This concept needs further explanantion.



Comment 4

fine.

PAGE 3



Comment 5

Excellent analytical comment and critical evaluation.

PAGE 4



Comment 6

Interesting distinction in use.

PAGE 5



Comment 7

immersive?

PAGE 6



Comment 8

Refer to the parent's rationale more here.

PAGE 7



Comment 9

Interesting focus.

PAGE 8



Comment 10

Good.

PAGE 9

PAGE 10



Background reading

Evidence of wide reading

PAGE 11



Bilingualism research

English vocabulary score was a positive significant correlate of executive attention among the bilingual children, but those bilingual children above the group median in English vocabulary did not outperform the monolingual children when the comparison was adjusted for nonverbal IQ. These findings suggest that a language learning ability may explain the association between bilingualism and executive function.

for further discussion see

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353778632_Majority_language_skill_not_measures_

PAGE 12

Strikethrough.



application of theory.

Appropriate application of theory.



Comment 12

ExcleInt attention to detail.

PAGE 13



Comment 13

Very useful range of reading.