



# FAQ GUIDE

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR BILINGUAL PARENTS



## ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS

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### IS MY CHILD CONFUSED?

Certain behaviours that can appear like confusion in a child bilingual are ones like the trait of 'code switching', meaning that your child mixes words from two language systems interchangeably within the same sentence.

For instance, if a mandarin- English bilingual used the mandarin word for 'dog' whilst speaking in English this would be considered code switching. However this is a completely normal part of bilingual development and can happen for the following reasons. 1) They could have picked this behaviour up from the wider community, and are merely mimicking the adult conversation habits.

(1) 2)

A process in learning language is dealing with borders in language. For instance a child only knows so many words and must use their limited vocabulary flexibly. This is also seen in monolingual children in the process of 'Overextension' coined by Leslie Rescorla, which means that young children, bilingual or monolingual often use specific words and extend their meanings to something similar. For example, generalising the word apple for all fruit would be what Leslie Rescorla calls overextension. (2)



However this is also seen as a completely normal part of language acquisition and all children gradually grow out of it. Code switching can be mistaken for confusion as many theorists, such as McLaughlin believed that this interchange was evidence for children having one 'fused system' instead of differentiating between two systems. (3) However, new evidence has proven that infants can distinguish between languages from as young as birth (4), and that they can understand minute differences, like tone, rhythm and even within research done by Weikum found that 4 month old infants can distinguish minute facial differences. (5)

This means that bilingual children are not confused any more than monolingual children when acquiring language. There is also an overarching myth that bilingual children are more likely to have language disorders than monolinguals; however this is simply a myth as there is no evidence to support that idea. Despite parents worries that a child may be behind, it seems as though this is because of the nature of duplicate words within a vocabulary.

### HOW DOES LANGUAGE AT HOME AFFECT MY CHILD?

The language environment of which your child is brought up in will have countless influence on your child's acquisition of language, and there are many factors in promoting a balance of both languages. Ronjat believes that one parents speaking one language to the child promotes bilingualism (6) however this is not the only way to promote bilingualism.

When thinking about language at home and ways to improve your child's acquisition of language it's important to remember these facts.

1) Infants need to have a lot of varied and deep exposure to language, meaning that to absorb the languages in depth. (7)

2) Television is not suitable for language acquisition as can lead to smaller vocabulary sizes (8) 3)

Balanced exposure of both languages is required. For instance, having parents who are constantly using both languages, (for this example, Mandarin-English) will ensure an exposure rate to both languages between 40-60% which is more than enough exposure for your child. 4) Children aren't going to be able to learn a language from a few encounters with their grandparents or a domestic helper, and the language is not constant and meaningful, adhering to the 40%-60% rule, there is little chance of this (9). Child Directed Speech includes features of vowel hyper articulation, high affect and higher pitch. These features of speech are for the benefit of acquiring language, turn taking, and 'motherese' help children learn how to understand and create sentences of their own.

Important impacts of home life do include the quality and quantity of language but directly linked to these is the social economic status of the household. 10,000 hours of input are the average for basic levels of communication and it's been found that professional's offspring hear 30 million more words by the time they are four years old (10) Meaning that as parents you can maximize the chances of your child being proficient with language is to introduce as much high quality languages as possible.

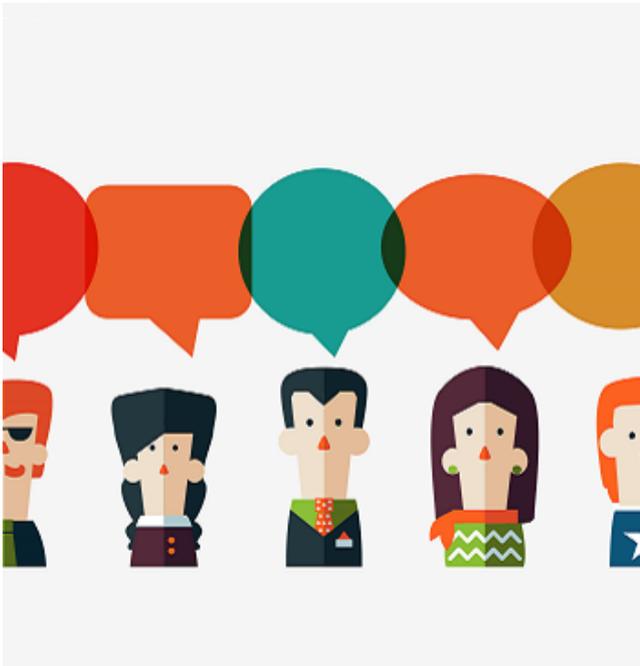


### HOW WILL LANGUAGE AT SCHOOL AFFECT MY CHILD?

lingual education within societies that bilingualism is accepted (Such as Singapore) is relatively simple with many schools and international schools have programmes to encourage bilingualism. Some offer immersion programmes in which children are exposed to one language. And others have two teachers speaking different languages and will interact with them equally all day. (11) However school for bilinguals can be difficult because if there isn't a dedicated language programme, classes and assessments will most likely be taken in the 'official' language of the country which may not be the language you speak at home, resulting in an unbalanced input of the two languages.

### IS IT BEST TO WAIT TILL MY CHILD IS OLDER TO AVOID CONFUSING MY CHILD WITH TWO LANGUAGES?

Typically earlier exposure and experimentation with language is much better and much more effective than waiting till a child is older. One reason for this is simply that intellectually, adults are less able to obtain and creatively use a second language, some research found that after 20 years, ability to obtain a language dramatically decline. (12) As well as a biological change that may make infants more receptive to language, there is also the fact that infants are surrounded by hours of interesting and engaging language stimulation compared to the sterile and often boring environment second language learners are exposed to (13) With the absence of 'motherese' and child directed language, which can shape a child when learning how to interact and shape conversational cues and turn taking, second language is left to be taught via a classroom which can be an uninspiring very dry environment.



## HOW DOES SINGAPORE IMPACT LANGUAGE?

Paired with the lack of actual time older children and adults may have to practice and attend one a week classes it may often not lead to successful internalisation of both languages due to the uninspiring content and lack of balanced exposure to the language. With the absence of any evidence suggesting that bilingual children are any more likely than monolingual children to have language disorders (14), there is no reason to not expose your child to dual languages as soon as possible.

Singapore is a country which has four main languages due to the diverse and cultural melting pot society. Tamil, Mandarin, Malay and English are used interchangeably throughout Singapore. Even on the public transport system which makes announcements in different languages and signs are written in all four. Hearing these many different forms of language, Parents may worry that the languages will confuse their child, however as previously discussed in this booklet children are extremely good at differentiating between different forms of language, due to sounds and even facial patterns. Singapore can also offer different types of schools which can cater to each parents need for language, for instance Mandarin classes or Tamil classes. There is no reason to believe that being surrounded by different forms of language in day to day life will hinder the successful acquisition of dual languages however it is unlikely that the child will acquire all four, as there is most likely not enough deep and meaningful exposure as the only exposure to these forms of languages is wider community and occasional input if these languages are not spoken at home. For instance if parents speak Mandarin-English and the child is exposed to Tamil and Malay in day to day Singapore, it's likely the child will not acquire these minority languages as there is no in depth input from parents who do not speak these languages.

## WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR BEING BILINGUAL?

Potential advantages of bilingualism are not only on a personal level, for instance there is untold potential to knowing multiple languages. Travel, employment and creating connections between different cultures are personally invaluable. Studies such as the Bialystock and Senman found that there are also benefits to social understanding and have been proven to have a higher level of sensitivity to features such as tone of voice. (15) Cognitive advantages to bilingualism, monolinguals appear to perform a little worse on tasks that involve switching between activities and inhibiting previously learned responses and evidence has been found that in children as young as infants can have certain advancements in memory. (16) Advantages such as these can be attributed to the nature of switching back and forth between dual languages. Constant practice in inhibiting one language, as they selectively speaks and understand in the other may be linked to advantages in training the brain. (17)



## WHERE CAN I READ FURTHER INTO THESE TOPICS?

For further reading into Bilingualism and ways in which you could help your child acquire a language with less difficulty please find the attached websites useful and informative.

- <https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/bilingual-advantage-aging-brain>
- <https://sg.theasianparent.com/benefits-of-bilingualism-for-your-child/>
- [https://www.babycenter.com/0\\_raising-a-bilingual-child-the-top-five-myths\\_10340869.bc](https://www.babycenter.com/0_raising-a-bilingual-child-the-top-five-myths_10340869.bc)
- <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/BilingualChildren/>
- <http://thebilingualadvantage.com/what-is-bilingualism-2/>
- [http://www.nie.edu.sg/docs/default-source/nie-working-papers/niewp4\\_for-web\\_v2.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.nie.edu.sg/docs/default-source/nie-working-papers/niewp4_for-web_v2.pdf?sfvrsn=2)
- [https://www.sph.com.sg/system/assets/735/drjFtBII\\_LKY%20bilingual%20book%20summary.pdf](https://www.sph.com.sg/system/assets/735/drjFtBII_LKY%20bilingual%20book%20summary.pdf)
- <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0189/d6eb41530de1195a21bcf0d8d532ea96d995.pdf>

The final two links are specific for the Singapore parent context and is designed to help appropriately shape the information for your situation.



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