

A First Look at Strategies for Raising Bilingual Children

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Abstract: In recent years, with the rising awareness of "bilingual education" in society, the trend of second language learning at a younger age has become an irreversible teaching trend, but at present, bilingual education for young children in China is still in the exploratory stage, and has not yet formed a systematic and scientific education system based on theories such as second language acquisition theory and critical period hypothesis theory. This article attempts to explore the most important factors in raising bilingual children, based on these advises given in Colin Baker's book "A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism", to provide more practical guidance on second language acquisition for young children.

1. Introduction

Bilingualism is a term that hides a complex phenomenon. In a few words, bilingualism, as opposed to monolingual, refers to a speaker's ability to use two languages for communication. Today, there are over 6,000 languages spoken around the world. As far back as 1999, it has been shown that there are many more bilingual or multilingual people in the world than there are people who speak only one language (Tucker & Richard, 1999, p.2). With globalisation and advances in science and technology, more and more parents are realising the importance of developing their children's bilingual skills, how to raise bilingual children is therefore a topic of concern for many parents. There are many factors that influence a child's acquisition of a second language, such as individual differences in children, parental attitudes towards second language learning, bilingual learning strategies and the influence of the social environment.

2. The most important factors in raising a bilingual child

2.1 Baker's answer

In "A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism", Baker argues that bilingualism is an umbrella term, being bilingual is not just about ability in two languages. It is also about use of language (Baker, 2000, p.10). Therefore, outside of the formal bilingual learning classroom, bilingual learning and application at home, in the community and in society is also very important for the development of children's bilingual skills.

In this book, Baker sorted out the concept of bilinguals. Since language ability are "multicolored" (Baker, 2000, p.5), the classification of a person as bilingual or monolingual requires a combination consideration of listening, reading, speaking, writing and inner thinking (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). According to François Grosjean (1985), there are two different views of defining a bilingual, the Fractional View of Bilingualism, which consider bilingual as 'two monolinguals in one person', and the Holistic View, which sees bilingualism not as the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals, but as a person with distinctive linguistic features. ', while the holistic view sees bilingualism not as the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals, but as having distinct linguistic characteristics. Combining the above definitions of bilinguals, baker concludes the most important factors in raising bilingual children in two ways: Firstly, the most important factor in raising bilingual children is to establish a relaxed and enjoyable bilingual learning environment for them, to

teach children to value their two languages and two cultures, and to build their linguistic confidence. Secondly, the frequency of adequate exposure to both languages is crucial, and when a child speaks a minority language, it is necessary to increase the frequency of exposure to the minority language.

2.2 Theory of Internal and External factors

Second language learning is a complex learning process. Unlike first language learning, the learning outcomes of second language learners often vary greatly depending on the characteristics and experiences of each individual. In the chapter 2 of “English Language Teaching in its Social Context”, Patsy M. Lightbrown and Nina Spada explore factors affecting second language learning. In general, these factors that affect second language learning are grouped into five categories: motivation, aptitude, personality, intelligence, and learner preferences (Lightbrown & Spada, 2000, p.1). However, according to this classification method, many personal characteristics cannot simply be grouped together.

In my opinion, the factors that influence the development of bilingual children can be broadly divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors include the child's own intelligence, attitude, motivation and age; external factors include the language structures in society, home and school learning environment, bilingual learning strategies, frequency of exposure to the language, etc.

Due to the complex meaning of bilingualism and the large individual differences among bilingual children, it is difficult to distinguish which factors are the most important in the process of raising bilingual children. From my personal experience, I agree with Mr. Baker's opinion that increasing the frequency of language exposure is the key to developing bilingualism in children. In addition, I believe although that a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment is an important facilitator of bilingual acquisition, motivation, as an internal factor, is even more important in influencing bilingual learning.

3. Practical significance of Baker's theory

3.1 Set appropriate goals

In order to better develop child's bilingualism, it is important to understand what bilingualism entails and to set goals for your child's bilingual learning. Setting appropriate bilingual learning goals will help to develop an appropriate bilingual learning programme and to correct the child's purpose for bilingual learning.

Firstly, although Circumstantial bilinguals have a strong motivation to learn second language (to survive), their first language is in danger of being replaced by a second language. Circumstantial bilinguals therefore need to build up their linguistic confidence in their first language and increase the frequency of exposure to their first language.

Secondly, Additive bilingualism will foster a more positive attitude towards second language learning, while subtraction bilingualism will form a more negative emotion towards the first language. Therefore, we need to build an additive bilingual learning environment for bilingual children and guide them to correct bilingual learning beliefs.

Thirdly, According to Vivian Cook (1992), most multilingual speakers fall somewhere between minimal and maximal definitions. Therefore, in general, it is most appropriate and desirable to set the goal of having the child become a balance bilingualism.

3.2 Focus on bilingual input

Bilingual learning is an complex process that involves the recognition and reproduction of a range of sounds or symbols and their agreed meanings of two language, the understanding of grammatical rules, and the acquisition of the motor skills necessary to use the language (e.g. pronunciation, writing, etc.). Correct and frequent bilingual input is a crucial part of improving bilingualism.

Bilingualism input can be divided into two categories: structured input and meaningful input. According to B.F. Skinner (1958), all learning, including language learning, is a process of habit formation. In this process, a stimulus produces a response that is reinforced into a habit. Therefore,

In order to succeed in learning a second language, a second language has to be presented in small, highly sequenced doses with plenty of practice and reinforcement to children. Based on the characteristics of structural input, it is valuable to implement Audiolingualism method for bilingual children, repeating bilingual vocabulary, phrases and sentences in daily life, constantly imitating and memorising small conversations to increase the structural input of bilingualism to children.

In the second place, in the eyes of other linguists, language is essentially a tool for conveying meanings. Language development can be also seen as a process of implicit rule formation, rather than explicit habit formation. Based on this point of view, it is also necessary to strengthen children's language meaningful input and enhance communication skills learning.

3.3 Enhance learning motivation

According to Dörnyei (1998, p. 117), “Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning in the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process”. There are various ways of acquiring bilingualism, whether it is simultaneous bilingualism, or sequential bilingualism, which requires a long and efficient process of language learning or acquisition. Developing a strong motivation to learn bilingualism and guiding children to establish the right purpose for bilingualism are important factors that influence the development of bilingualism in children.

Research on bilingual learning motivation in the 1970s concluded that integrative motivation was more likely than instrumental motivation to enable bilinguals to set long-term learning goals, thus establishing a long-term bilingual learning mechanism and achieving success in bilingual acquisition. Later research has shown that instrumental motivation may be stronger than integrative motivation in the process of bilingual learning. Therefore, we should combine integrative and instrumental motivation, and help children to set short-term, strongly stimulating instrumental motivation while strengthening their linguistic confidence in both languages, their cultural identity in both cultures, and stimulating their integrative motivation to want to integrate into the language society.

3.4 Balance bilingual learning and use

The failure or success of bilingual learning is a complex phenomenon, which is the result of individual and collective interaction.

Not every bilingual person has the same opportunities to use both languages in their daily life, study and work. In fact, due to social structure, public attitudes, national policies and other reasons, bilingual children often find themselves mastering languages with a distinction between minority languages and majority languages. In such cases, if the child is not properly guided, it is likely that the child will refuse to use and learn minority languages due to the higher status and popularity of majority languages. This has been demonstrated by many second-generation immigrants, such as the second generation of Chicanos who immigrated to the United States. Furthermore, when a minority language has been historically devalued and the speakers of the minority language are seen as having an inferior status, bilinguals tend to use the minority language only in a private and domestic context. In western Brittany, France, for example, many Bretons use their Breton only among family and close friends (Baker & Jones, 1998).

Therefore, when a language is seen as less important, children will tend to avoid it, which is extremely detrimental to the balanced development of bilingual learning. In addition, numerous experiments have shown that bilinguals show a 'degradation' in the phonology, vocabulary and grammar of their first language when they are immersed in a second language environment for a long period of time, with reduced exposure to and use of their first language. In conclusion, to respect the status of minority languages, at the same time to develop tolerance for foreign languages, and encourage children to consciously balance bilingual learning and use opportunities, is the basis of a successful bilingual education.

4. Conclusion

The cultivation of bilingual children is a complex and long process, not only from the social structure, public ideas, and family atmosphere, learning strategies and other external factors, the child's personal age, intelligence, motivation, habits, language beliefs and other internal factors are also important factors affecting the bilingual acquisition. Based on Baker's theory, I propose that that motivation and the frequency of bilingual exposure are probably the two most important factors and put forward four suggestions on cultivating bilingual children.

My suggestions have only touched on the tip of the iceberg of what affects bilingualism. Since the 1970s, people have studied the second language acquisition from different aspects, and the research methods have their own characteristics. Some studies focus on description, some on hypothesis, and some on experiment. In the past few decades, the multi-aspect and multi-method research pattern of second language has led to the endless emergence of theories in this field, which has provided valuable experience for the cultivation of bilingual and even multilingual talents. With the deepening and continuous expansion of the research, we believe that in the near future, we will establish a more scientific and systematic bilingual or multilingual personnel training mechanism.

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