EARLY BILINGUAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT 2016/7

References:
Baker 2011 ch5
Genesee 2008
Unsworth 2013

1. Types of childhood bilingualism

NB. There are no exact boundaries between these two types.

a. Simultaneous. Child acquires two languages at the same time, from birth. = infant bilingualism. Eg. Two parents, two languages.
b. Sequential. Eg One language at home, and another at kindergarten or primary school.
c. But, not so simple. What about a home with L1, and a live in maid for L2 + kindergarten for L2, plus exposed to L3 regularly through family friends.
d. Kindergarten education, in a pre-school context, usually does NOT use formal instruction in that language. Where formal work is attempted, it usually focuses on meaning and understanding, rather than form.

2. Simultaneous

a. Often thought 2 languages from birth MUST be detrimental to a child's language growth, to the point of even claiming this leads to retardation.
b. Babies appear biologically ready for two languages, from birth.
c. 'Typically' [make sure you know what this means] seen as providing benefits, cognitive, in culture, communication, higher eventual achievement, and increases job and promotion prospects/
d. To acquire two languages from birth, babies need to differentiate between them and store them for both input and output.
e. Baker 2011 ch5. Possible, bilingual babies are at an advantage, since they need to pay more attention to language.

3. Language differentiation

It used to be commonly thought that the children learning two languages simultaneously **go through a stage when they cannot differentiate their two languages**. Almost all studies have shown that such children mix elements from their two languages. Some have interpreted this as evidence for an undifferentiated, or unitary underlying language system. Modern research shows that young bilinguals are psycholinguistically able to differentiate their two languages from the earliest stages, and they can use their two languages in functionally differentiated ways, thereby providing evidence of differentiated underlying language systems. But obviously they do not do so always, and do not always consciously differentiate.

a. Infants show discrimination between the two languages very early. Memory for language sounds even operates in the fetal stage, such that the processes of bilingual acquisition appear to start before birth. Upon birth, newborns immediately prefer their mother's voice to that of any other mother, but not if the mother's recorded voice is played backwards. Also, newborns respond more to prose passages read to them regularly before birth than to new prose, even when not read by the mother. Thus an infant is not just recognizing the mother's voice. There is also immediate sound discrimination: the beginning of 'breaking the code'. There appears to be an immediate receptive language differentiation in the newborn particularly in intonation (De Houwer, 2009a). This can be extended from monolingualism to bilingualism as Mehler et al. (1988) found that newborns can distinguish their parents' native language sounds from unfamiliar foreign language sounds.

b. A study of speech perception by Bosch and Sebastián-Gallés (1997) found that early bilingual infants at 4–5 months old responded differently to their two languages compared with a language they had not heard before. That is, early bilinguals can distinguish between languages they have heard, prenatally and since birth, compared with a new, unheard language.

c. Maneva and Genesee (2002) found that in the babbling stage, a child (around 10–12 months of age) exposed to two languages from birth (a) has a tendency to babble in their stronger language, (b) demonstrates language-specific babbling features of each language, but (c) may not babble with context-specific accuracy. Language-specific patterns and some speech differentiation may thus occur before the first birthday.

d. Recent research has found that bilingual children (two years old or earlier) know which language to speak 'to whom' and in 'what situation' (De Houwer, 2009a, 2009b; Deuchar & Quay, 2000; Meisel, 2004). Very young children easily switch languages and differentiate their two languages, but there is individual variation. For example, Deuchar and Quay (1999, 2000) found that a bilingual child as young as, and younger than, two years of age uses two languages in contextually sensitive ways. In the last five months of a child's second year (1:7 to 2:0), utterances were beginning to be matched to the context (e.g. which language to use with each parent). That is, an appropriate language was used in particular locations. 'Our results show that a child as young as 1:7 appears to be able to take account of a range of complex factors in language choice. These included not only the language of the interlocutor, but also the location of the interaction' (Deuchar & Quay, 2000: 111).

From pivot-grammar onwards ie two-word stage, children use language specific and different syntactic constructions when speaking to people of different languages. They also use different phonological patterns. Research on speech perception in children raised bilingually (Catalan and Spanish) show that they can discriminate different language-specific phonological contrasts as early as 4½ months of age, before they produce their first words.

e. Thus the ability to use the appropriate language with a particular person occurs very early. Nicoladis (1998) found that social awareness of the one parent – one language (often shortened to OPOL) routine seems to encourage an awareness of translation equivalents and two separate language systems. 'Children's understanding of the appropriate social use of their two languages may lead to an understanding that the translation equivalents in their vocabulary belong to two distinct input languages' (Nicoladis, 1998: 105).

f. Genesee et al. (1996) found that 'appropriate language matching' is found in two- year-olds from bilingual homes when talking to strangers. Children rapidly and accurately accommodated the monolingualism or bilingualism of a stranger and talked in the appropriate language. A study of a Dutch and English bilingual aged three showed that the child could accurately choose the appropriate language when speaking with a monolingual person (De Houwer, 1990). Also, the child was much more ready to use both languages (i.e. codeswitching) in conversation with people she knew to be fluent bilinguals. The study suggests that bilingual children tend to mix languages less when addressing monolinguals, but move relatively more between two languages when addressing bilinguals. This 'sensitivity to interaction with others' appears in older bilinguals, but Comeau et al. (2003) also found such sensitivity in two-year-old bilinguals (age between 2:0 and 2:7).

4. Code mixing [here taken to be equivalent to 'code mixing']

a. The age at which a child differentiates their two language systems and relatively infrequently codemixes will differ considerably from child to child, with the interaction between adults and the child, the nature of the adult input, increasing self-awareness in the child, adjusting to adult norms, varying context, and the child's relative proficiency in each language being influential.

NB. Mixing at all levels has been reported: phonological, lexical, phrasal, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. The context is important: if role models (eg parents) mix languages, then there is less likely to be differentiation. This means confusion.

b. When young children do codemix, this is more about experience than a mental jumble of languages. Mixing languages is about being inventive within current resources and does not indicate a muddle. Deuchar and Quay (2000) found that mixed utterances in a young child could be accounted for by 'a gap in lexical resources: that is, the child uses a word from an inappropriate language because she does not have the word from the appropriate language in her vocabulary' (p. 113). This suggests that codemixing is partly about language proficiency levels in the child, something that is temporary and decreases with dual language proficiency. Bilingual adults occasionally also do this when they cannot immediately remember a word or phrase in a language. For adults, this tends to be viewed as being pragmatic; for young children (in contradiction and incorrectly) as a problem. As children grow older, they acquire the language abilities found in their parents and community.

Bilingual children mix because they lack appropriate lexical items in one of their languages. Is mixing more a question of developing competence than underlying psycholinguistic separation? Bilingual children do tend to mix less as their proficiency increases.

A lot depends on what you expect to find. Genesee 2001 argues about code-mixing:

a. bilingual children mix more when using their less proficient language.
b. the mixing is more likely when translation equivalents are difficult

The important point is that child bilingual code-mixing does not reflect an incapacity of the language faculty to develop functionally differentiated systems during the initial stages of acquisition. **Code-mixing is more appropriately viewed in terms of proficiency, not underlying competence**.

c. As Toribio (2004) suggests: 'intra-sentential codeswitching is not a random mixture of two flawed systems; rather, it is rule-governed and systematic, demonstrating the operation of underlying grammatical restrictions. Proficient bilinguals may be shown to exhibit a shared knowledge of what constitutes appropriate intra-sentential codeswitching' (p. 137).

d. Codeswitching is affected by the language model provided by parents and significant others in the family and community. If parents codeswitch regularly, then their children may imitate. If parents discourage codeswitching (e.g. by clear language separation), then less mixing will occur. What is culturally appropriate, the norm of the community, and what is valued by parents and others will have an important influence (Luykx, 2003), as may the extent of the child's repertoire in each language. Such codeswitching is not evidence of a lack of separation or discrimination between languages in the child. If a child knows that the parent, for example, can understand both languages, then codeswitching may seem valuable in relaying a message.

e. Thus a variety of factors may affect a child's language choice: exposure to two languages in different social contexts, the attitudes of parents to the two languages and to mixing the languages, the language competences and metalinguistic abilities of the child, personality, peer interaction, exposure to different forms of language education, as well as sociolinguistic influences such as the norms, values and beliefs of the community (Nicoladis & Genesee, 1997).

'Accommodation' usually takes place, in which the inferior adapts to the perceived superior.

In conclusion regarding differentiation, Genesee (2002) suggests that 'it is now generally accepted that bilingual children can use their developing languages differentially and appropriately from the one word stage onward, and certainly from the age when there is evidence of syntax in their spoken language' (p. 173).

5. **The unitary-language system explanation / single-system hypothesis** Or differentiated language system.
   ie a common storage model of bilingual development, according to which all the rules from both languages are initially stored in a common location. Then later there is differentiation.

   Ie, proposed that, although bilingual children are exposed to different sets of linguistic input, they go through an initial stage when they have one linguistic system.

   If the unitary hypothesis is valid, it will be random which language is used. If there is total mixing, there will be no difference at all. **Even at the beginning it appears that there is some mixing and some separation.**

   Genesee 2001 states categorically that "Contrary to the unitary language system hypothesis, current evidence indicates consistently and clearly that bilingual children can use their developing languages differentially and appropriately with different interlocutors [people] from the earliest stages of productive language use" (p155). eg even though mixing does occur, the proportion varies with who they are speaking to, and they can be almost monolingual with monolinguals. This also indicates that there is a pragmatic element from the beginning, ie one word stage.

Code switching in adults

- One language usually provides the framework
- Can happen at word, phrase, sentence or paragraph level
- Is highly sensitive to the other person and what they understand
- Extremely skilful
- Often subconscious
- In some people it has become the most common variety
- Very sensitive to pragmatics as well as semantics, eg the shock level of a phrase
- Provides terms which may not be known, or not exist in another language
- Provides a nuance, or a context – overtones.