

Children's Insights on Friendships and Becoming Bilingual



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Becoming bilingual

- The majority of the world speaks more than one language
- Multiple languages are learned
 - simultaneously
 - sequentially
- The impact of sequential language learning has rarely been studied from a child's perspective
- Enabling children to share their stories provides valuable insight for educators

Participants

- Monolingual English-speaking siblings
 - “Samantha” 9- to 10-year-old female
 - “Bowser” 6- to 7-year-old male
- English-speaking parents who learned German as adults (previously lived in Germany for work)
- Family moved to Germany for parents’ work in 2010
- Children attended an international school in Germany



Gaining assent and consent

Assent (children)

A child-friendly information sheet was read to the children (each time)

Children signed the sheet if happy 😊 with the information

Consent (parents)

A standard information sheet and consent form was given to the parents at beginning and end of research

Consent and assent

Additional consent and assent was gained to share artefacts



Procedure

Child-friendly interviews tools were used to stimulate conversations around becoming bilingual at 4 time points

- Time 1: Two months before moving to Germany
- Time 2: One month after moving to Germany
- Time 3: Six months after moving to Germany
- Time 4: 12 months after moving to Germany

Sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis

Procedure

Tasks

1. Drawing task (adapted from Holliday, 2009)
“Draw me a picture of you talking to someone”
2. Faces questionnaire from SPAA-C
(adapted from McLeod, 2004)
3. KiddyCat: Communication attitude test for preschool and kindergarten children who stutter
(Vanryckeghem & Brutten, 2006)
4. Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology (DEAP)
(Dodd et al., 2002) (time 1 only)

Analysis

Grounded theory was used to derive themes arising from

- artefacts (drawings and interview record forms)
- interview transcripts

Analytic observations were made using the Theoretical Ideas of Childhood Studies

(Mayall, 2002; Prout & James, 1997)

Findings

Three main themes arose from the children's data

1. Awareness of language difference /competence
2. Being included: strategies and opportunities for friendship
3. Being excluded: strategies and opportunities for friendship

The children focused on their experiences of becoming bilingual in the playground

Theme 1: Awareness of language difference /competence

Both children frequently commented on their language competence

“How do you feel about the way you talk?”

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4
Samantha			 “nervous”	
Bowser				

Theme 1: Awareness of language difference /competence

Bowser

- Described himself as a competent communicator
- Preferred to speak with English-speakers
e.g. teacher

“he speaks Perth”

“he’s the best teacher in the world!”

- By time 4 Bowser described himself as sad and frightened when speaking in German



Theme 1: Awareness of language difference /competence

Samantha

- Initially described herself as a confident communicator
- Quickly became aware of difficulties speaking German
- Showed insight into complexities of communicating across languages
 - “if you are talking to non-English speakers, to make it into a nice simple easy thing when its actually quite complex English, it’s a bit hard... you have to make it sound easy when its actually quite complex.”
- By time 4 showed awareness of growing competency in German

Theme 2: Being included

Strategies and opportunities for friendship

Bowser

- Time 1: “I can always find another person [to play with]”
- Time 2: Noticed that football was a way to be included without speaking German
- Time 3: Of playing football “I’m the boss...we always win!”

Samantha

- Time 1: Described closeness with her best friend in Australia
- Time 2: Made friends with a Spanish-English speaking girl “Maria” who also spoke minimal German
- Time 4: Remarked that friendship was centred around talk, not play

Theme 3: Being excluded

Strategies and opportunities for friendship

- Prior to moving neither child experienced being excluded from friendships
- Both children experienced exclusion due to the language barrier in Germany

Bowser

- Time 2: “I don’t have a best friend...I don’t have any friends”
- Time 4:

“I was running and then I stopped and he said German stuff and I didn’t understand...”

And then I went “Mhmm” and he said “Hello” and I said “Guten Tag” and then he said “Ahhh Guten Tag” bye-bye, he was scared because I knew what Guten Tag means...

and he went “Ahh you English man”.

He was [so] scared that he couldn’t really talk.”

Theme 3: Being excluded

Strategies and opportunities for friendship

Samantha

- Time 2:

“A bit sad...no one to play with and it’s a big school”

- Time 3:

“...We always ask to play with them,
cause we don’t know what to do,
and so we ask them and they are always saying
that they need to talk [in German]
and then they take up the whole break.
They aren’t the nicest people in the world”.

Forming friendships

Time 1



Time 2



Time 3



Time 4



Discussion

- Forming friendships was a key theme identified by both children at all time points
- Children's age, gender and interests influenced how they constructed their own communicative competence
- Awareness of the implications of becoming bilingual came more quickly to Samantha
- Different forms of interaction
 - Bowser's peers used sport
 - Samantha's peers used language
- Language was used as a tool for both inclusion and exclusion in the playground



Implications

- Strong interplay between language and friendship
 - Language can be used to control and limit inclusion in social worlds
 - A mutual language was key to forming friends for Samantha
 - A mutual interest was key to forming friends for Bowser
- Increased diversity in everyday settings
 - Children placed importance on playground settings over academic achievement
 - Institutional rules have important implications for social interactions
- Child-centred approaches to research provide important insights for understanding children's worlds



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