

Dual Language Development in Children Pre-natal to Three

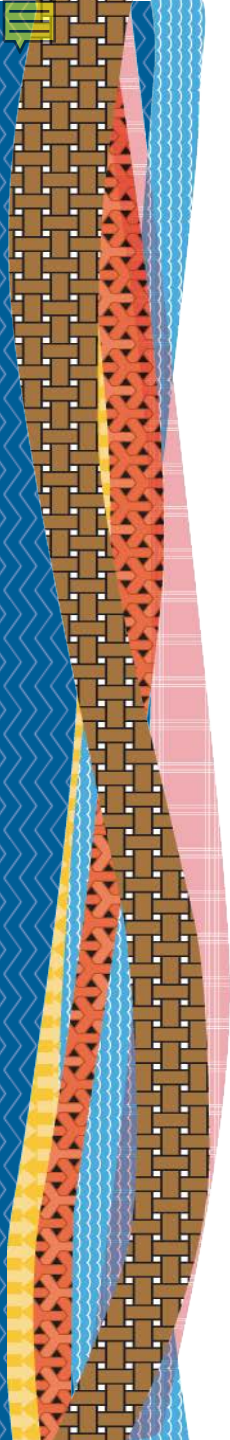
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THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Cultural and Linguistic
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Agenda

This session will address 3 questions:

- How do infants and toddlers develop a first language?
- What roles do environments play in first and second language acquisition?
- What are key research-to-practice implications for DLLs?

Who are DLLs?

The Office of Head Start definition of Dual Language Learners (DLLs) includes:

- children who “acquire two or more languages simultaneously” (i.e., from birth), as well as
- children who “learn a second language while continuing to develop their first language” (i.e., children begin their 2nd language at or around age three)
- Source: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>

How do infants and toddlers develop a first language?

- ‘Language development’ can be seen as a progression, or, alternatively, a series of progressions (Camaioni, 2004)
- First, children begin life capable of unintentional communication, for example, they cry when hungry

How do infants and toddlers develop a first language?

- Within a few months of their birth, children make the transition to **intentional** communication
- For example, they start to associate that their sounds or fussing is related to a particular outcome (e.g., being fed, changed, talked to)...
- Or, that their smile can attract attention....
- Or...?

How do infants and toddlers develop a first language?

First Language (L1) Milestones:

- Babbling/Proto-words
- First words (“daddy” “doggie” “no”)
- 2-word combinations (“mommy sock”)
- First 100 words/Vocabulary “burst”
- Simple sentences
- Elaborated language

Development: How?

Environmental factors:

- Participation & communication during routines
- Availability of language models
- Cultural objects, routines & practices; including beliefs/values of adults



Development: How?



Biological capabilities for language:

- Sounds
- Grammar
- Word meanings

Biological capabilities for learning:

- Recognition of patterns & of differences

Development: How?

- Early, non-verbal communication
- Participation in “real-life” activities
- Interactions with familiar people & objects
- Combined with careful observations & the ongoing development of ideas and information...
- Becomes increasingly sophisticated over time...
- Serving as the basis for the development of speech

Does exposure to more than one language in infancy lead children to become confused or delayed?

L1 Milestone: Babbling

- Bilingual exposure from birth did not delay either the onset of babbling (when it starts) or the volubility (quantity) compared with monolingual children
- The age at which infants who were exposed to two languages began babbling was “**remarkably similar**” to the age for infants exposed to one language (Oller et al. 1997)

Does exposure to more than one language in infancy lead children to become confused or delayed?



For a sample of dual-language toddlers:

- “Their milestones were also **similar** to the established norms for monolingual children’s first-word, first two-word combinations, and first 50 words” (Petito et al, 2001)

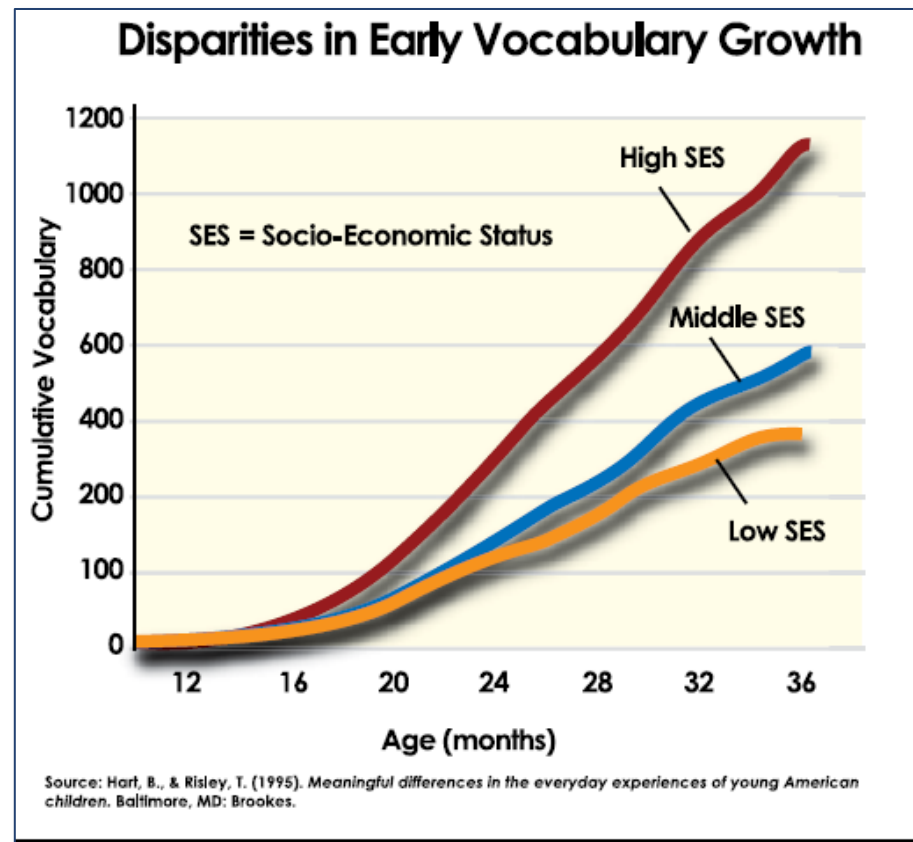
Does exposure to more than one language in infancy lead children to become confused or delayed?

- Bilingual exposure does not delay achievement of basic milestones
- Children can separate their languages from infancy; they need “enough” exposure to develop two languages
- “Code switching” is not a sign of confusion (instead, it is a communication strategy)
- A child’s home language is their fundamental resource for development

What roles do environments play in first and second language acquisition?



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What roles do environments play in first and second language acquisition?

Families studied – low-, middle-, and high-SES; children birth – three years:

- **No** differences in language input during family routines
- **Huge** differences in overall input (daily & cumulative)



What roles do environments play in first and second language acquisition?

Differences in parent language to their child between 12 – 24 months:

- High SES families: on average, **500** words per hour
- Low SES families: on average, **100** words per hour

What roles do environments play in first and second language acquisition?

- Differences between families = Use of **“extra and optional” talk**, i.e., language use that is above and beyond that used in carrying out daily routines
- Conversations/interactions are key developmental strategies to language acquisition; no separate set of “DLL strategies”
- Daily warm and responsive interactions promote positive outcomes

What are key research-to-practice implications?

What do we know about early dual language development?

- First and foremost, children are capable of developing two languages
- Big differences at early ages; biological and environmental factors combine
- Home and school environments are both important for outcomes; the strategies that adults use are key to positive long-term outcomes

What are key research-to-practice implications?

- Assessment practices must identify a child's languages, experiences with languages, and levels of development in those languages
- Assessment practices should integrate information from parents & family members; teacher observations; and instruments in order to identify knowledge, interests, and goals

Assessment

- Assess child's language skills in **both** of their languages
- Observe activities, communication, & language use in the classroom
- Utilize information from parents
- Assess the language resources of the child's teachers
- Develop understandings of language use in the home

Supporting children's progress

Child:

1. Non-verbal communication
2. Names of things
3. Describing
4. Understanding uses and functions

Adults (teachers, parents, family members):

1. Initiate & respond to joint attention
2. Support acquisition of basic vocabulary
3. Model descriptions of actions & objects
4. Extend & elaborate – discuss sequences, categories and examples...

Modeling Language

- **Self-Talk:** The adult talks about **what they are doing** as they are doing an activity... basically, you are a play-by-play announcer of yourself
- **Parallel Talk:** The adult talks about **what the child is doing** as they are doing an activity...
- These strategies can be implemented by parents or teachers... they can be implemented in either a child's home language or in English

Modeling Language

- Adults can use objects in the environment to involve children in activities –
- Or, observe how children use objects in the environment on their own –
- Then model the vocabulary that accompanies the activity – **this can be done in either the home language or in English**

Modeling Language

Connecting oral and written language:

- Use book reading to build children's vocabulary...choose books that match children's language level...find ways to connect book content with other learning experiences
- Use environmental print...find ways to connect written language in the environment to other learning experiences

Modeling Language

- Use play experiences – especially pretend play – art, movement, drawing, & sensory experiences to support development in a child’s first language – or in English
- Play allows children to create & extend narratives that reflect their knowledge & that facilitate a wide range of language use...

Modeling Language

Strategies for linking language and play include:

1. Asking & answering questions
2. Selecting themes/topics for play
3. Adapting/extending/changing topics
4. Requesting information
5. Making personal & inter-personal connections

Conclusions

- Children are born with a natural ability to communicate & the capacity to learn in one or more languages
- There is a multitude of information – continue to learn and apply information
- Parent-program partnerships are the best source of positive outcomes
- The difficulty of doing the work is exceeded only by its importance

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