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GROWING UP BILINGUALLY: A SURVEY INTO THE ASPECTS OF
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION WHEN TWO DIFFERENT LANGUAGES ARE
LEARNED AT THE SAME TIME

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

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Poděkování

Chtěla bych poděkovat vedoucí mé bakalářské práce, Mgr. Heleně Lohrové, Ph.D., za trpělivost a odborné vedení. Dále děkuji respondentům, kteří s ochotou spolupracovali ve výzkumu a byli nápomocni po celou dobu vypracování bakalářské práce.

Anotace

Předmětem této bakalářské práce jsou jazykové aspekty vyrůstání v bilingvním prostředí. Cílem práce je nahlédnout do života bilingvní rodiny, která zažívá raný bilingvismus u dětí, z pohledu rodičů i bilingvních jedinců a tyto dva pohledy porovnat. Součástí práce je teoretický úvod do problematiky bilingvismu u dětí a aspektů souvisejících s tímto tématem. Analytická část představuje provedení výzkum, v němž byly zkoumány zkušenosti s bilingvismem osmi rodin s dětmi, které se od raného dětství učí dvěma jazykům současně.

Klíčová slova

Bilingvismus; bilingvní rodina; dvojjazyčné děti; raný bilingvismus; jazyková analýza

Abstract

This bachelor thesis focuses on the linguistic aspects of growing up in a bilingual environment. The aim of the thesis is to gain an insight into the life of bilingual families experiencing early bilingualism in their children, to reflect on these experiences from the perspective of both parents and bilingual individuals and compare these two views. The thesis includes a theoretical introduction to bilingualism in children. The analytical part presents the undertaken research, in which the experiences examining the bilingualism of eight families with children who learn two languages at the same time from early childhood were investigated.

Key words

Bilingualism; bilingual family; bilingual children; early bilingualism; language analysis

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	9
2	Literature Review	11
2.1	Introduction	11
2.2	The phenomenon of bilingualism.....	11
2.3	Bilingualism in children	12
2.3.1	Types of early bilingualism	12
2.3.2	Factors affecting bilingualism in children	13
2.3.3	Typology of bilingual families	15
2.3.4	Methods for raising bilingual children.....	15
2.3.5	Bilingual siblings	17
2.3.6	Aspects related to language acquisition.....	17
2.3.7	Advantages, disadvantages, and prejudices of early bilingualism.....	18
2.4	Summary	21
3	Methodology.....	22
3.1	Introduction	22
3.2	Data collection	22
3.3	Respondents	25
3.4	Data processing	27
3.4.1	Questionnaire data	27
3.4.2	Interview data	27
3.5	Summary	28
4	Analysis	29
4.1	Data	29
4.1.1	Family A	29
4.1.2	Family B	32
4.1.3	Family C	34

4.1.4	Family D	36
4.1.5	Family E.....	38
4.1.6	Family F.....	40
4.1.7	Family G	42
4.1.8	Family H	44
4.1.9	Data Summary	45
4.2	Data Analysis	46
4.2.1	The family environment.....	46
4.2.2	The process of language acquisition.....	47
4.2.3	The state of bilingualism and the language use	50
4.2.4	Observations, advantages, and disadvantages	50
4.3	Discussion	52
5	Conclusion.....	54
	Works Cited.....	56
	Appendix.....	59

List of Figures and Tables

List of figures

Figure 1: Description of the research sample	25
Figure 2: Description of the research sample by gender	26
Figure 3: The languages in which the individuals are bilingual	26
Figure 4: Family A description	29
Figure 5: Helpful elements – son of family A	31
Figure 6: Helpful elements – daughter of family A	31
Figure 7: Family B description	32
Figure 8: Helpful elements – daughter of family B	33
Figure 9: Family C description	34
Figure 10: Helpful elements – son of family C	35
Figure 11: Family D description	36
Figure 12: Helpful elements – daughter of family D	37
Figure 13: Family E description	38
Figure 14: Helpful elements – daughter of family E	39
Figure 15: Family F description.....	40
Figure 16: Helpful elements – daughter of family F	41
Figure 17: Family G description	42
Figure 18: Helpful elements – daughter of family G.....	43
Figure 19: Family H description	44
Figure 20: The influences on language acquisition	48
Figure 21: Language skills of all bilinguals.....	49

List of tables

Table 1: Language skills – daughter and son of family A	30
Table 2: Language skills – daughter of family B.....	33
Table 3: Language skills – son of family C	35
Table 4: Language skills – daughter of family D	37
Table 5: Language skills – daughter of family E.....	39
Table 6: Language skills – daughter of family F	41
Table 7: Language skills – daughter of family G	43

1 Introduction

In recent years, bilingualism has become a society-wide and global phenomenon. Studies show that more than half of the world can be considered bilingual (Ansaldo et al. 540). Nowadays, the world is multicultural, often even within a single family. And this linguistic and cultural globalization is also expanding parents' interest in bilingual education for their children from an early age. This bachelor thesis explores the topic of growing up bilingually, as a survey into the aspects of language acquisition when two different languages are learned at the same time. The central focus of this thesis is to obtain the perspectives of both parents and children of a bilingual family in which two languages are learned simultaneously while growing up and to compare these insights. This study works with concrete data that provide insight into life with bilingualism, which is experienced by an increasing number of families today.

Bilingualism in children can be defined as the communicative competence of effective use of more than one language by the same individual, acquired spontaneously at an early age (Průcha 162; Li 22). From the beginning of life, the child is influenced by two linguistic inputs that lead to the acquisition of these two language systems (Průcha 164). In this study, this is the type of bilingual acquisition that occurs when children grow up in families that use both the majority language of the country and another distinct language that the child simultaneously acquires.

The research included in this thesis is presented as a case study, examining specific families in which bilingual children are being raised. These families either live in a foreign country and intend to retain the language of their homeland, or each parent speaks a different mother tongue. For all of them, it is not only a question of language knowledge but also the ability to integrate into society and to communicate in multiple cultures, which is important for each family. Respondents of this research provide personal experiences, attitudes, and reflections serving as an intervention of concrete real-life cases of families encountering bilingualism in children from an early age, which they acquire naturally. This data was obtained from 8 families where each family had a maximum of three children. In all cases, two of the following languages were combined in the children's bilingualism: English, German, and Czech. These families live in different countries, Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates, a country one of the families moved to while raising their children, which provides a broader scope for this research. In all families, the parent who was

mainly responsible for parental care of the children speaks to their children in their mother tongue, which is different from the majority language of the country. At the same time, one of the languages of bilingual children is always identical to the majority language of the country. It is important to note that, in the case of the family living in the United Arab Emirates, it was reported that English was the majority language, which the children encounter more than Arabic. This context is important for the study of specific families whose perceptions of bilingualism in children are examined.

The aim of the research was to gain an insight into the early life of a bilingual family from both the perspectives of parents and their bilingual children and create a comparison of their experiences. To achieve this, two mirroring questionnaires were constructed and the following goals were set. To identify the strategies used by parents in facilitating their children in the acquisition of two languages, examine the effectiveness of these strategies from the perspectives of both parents and their children and identify what worked and what did not. The study then compared these findings with the established body of literature on how to achieve bilingualism in the family home and explored what influences the achievement of successful bilingualism and what concrete individuals who have experienced early bilingualism think about it.

This bachelor thesis consists of three key parts. The literature review serves to present the existing literature on the topic of bilingualism in children and to understand the theoretical background of the main topic within the context of the research. The methodology outlines the research methods applied. This section is followed by the analysis of data collected across eight bilingual families. This survey into the aspects of language acquisition when two different languages are learned at the same time based on a research study can serve as a subject for further research in this area.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section of the thesis presents a literature review of the available literature on the research topic of growing up bilingually. Bilingualism has been of long-standing interest to parents, researchers, and educators for several decades (Baker and Jones 1998; Bouko 2020; Frantini 1985; Harding-Esch and Riley 2003; Hoffmann 1991; Průcha 2011; Li 2008), but there is still much to be discovered about this topic. Many specialists, linguists, and psychologists have dealt with this concept, who have not yet been able to clarify the exact boundaries (Baker 2–3; Bhatia and Ritchie 21; Harding-Esch and Riley 23; Li 22; Myers-Scotton 3). In the case of bilingualism in children, defining this concept is even more challenging, as it is an under-researched area. The central focus of this thesis, early bilingualism acquired by children spontaneously, remains insufficiently clarified. Capturing the real-life perspectives of parents and children on the acquisition of two languages simultaneously while growing up as an aspect of bilingualism can be supported by insight into the literature in the context of the bilingual family.

2.2 The phenomenon of bilingualism

Prior to clarifying bilingualism in children, it is necessary to first define more precisely what bilingualism is. Bilingualism has been studied by many linguists, there are several ways to define the term. According to L. Bloomfield, bilingualism is a “*native-like control of two languages*” (qtd. in Harding-Esch and Riley 23). However, it is not possible to define the degree of perfection at which a non-native speaker becomes bilingual, the distinction is relative (Harding-Esch and Riley 23). Another definition is presented by E. Haugen, according to which bilingualism begins when “*the speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language*” (qtd. in Harding-Esch and Riley 23). It is important to note that bilingualism is not considered as the common use of a foreign language learned for example in school, but of obtaining the language from a bilingual environment. Thus, the term bilingualism in this thesis refers to an individual's knowledge of two language repertoires with acceptance of differences in their levels.

2.3 Bilingualism in children

“As for bilingualism in children, I have not come across any adequate definition” (Průcha 162). Bilingualism in children is a complicated construct. If it is researched, it is more from a pedagogical point of view, such as teaching foreign languages in schools, what methods can be used and what results can be achieved. The concept of bilingualism in children, also called early bilingualism, examined in this bachelor thesis can be defined as *“...the language proficiency of a child who acquires two languages at about the same level as a monolingual child acquires one language before starting school”* (Průcha 164). The most common way of becoming bilingual is that children are exposed to two languages at the same time from an early age, resulting in the simultaneous acquisition of the two languages naturally (Baker 2–3).

2.3.1 Types of early bilingualism

Early bilingualism can be classified according to different types, which serve to provide a clear overview of the type of bilingualism regarding not only the beginning, the proceeding but also the resulting bilingualism. The several types help to place the bilingual individual in certain groups according to the way of language acquisition, their usage or language abilities.

- Spontaneous (simultaneous) bilingualism

The first type of early bilingualism related to this study is spontaneous bilingualism. In other studies, it can also be found under the term simultaneous, but both express the same phenomenon. In this case, the child acquires both languages naturally from the bilingual family environment during infancy at the same time. For example, a family in which each parent speaks a different language to the child results in the natural acquisition of both languages. This type differs from successive or sequential bilingualism, when the child first acquires language competence in one language and then in the other language, usually as part of the educational process in the school system (Ansaldo et al. 540; Průcha 163).

- Active and passive bilingualism

The second distinction is between active and passive bilingualism. Active bilingualism denotes the individual's ability to understand and speak both languages, while passive

bilingualism implies a limited capability to speak one of the languages. Knowing this division is very essential to the study of early bilingualism in children since both types are widely found (Cunningham 54–57; Myers-Scotton 44).

- Dominant and balanced bilingualism

The final division relevant to this study is dominant and balanced bilingualism. Dominant bilingualism occurs when one of the languages tends to be more proficient than the other one. On the contrary, balanced bilingualism means, that a speaker knows both languages at the same or similar level. However, the concept of balanced bilingualism can be problematic, since the exact level of proficiency is hard to measure, and this type is rather rare (Baker 9; Bhatia and Ritchie 115).

2.3.2 Factors affecting bilingualism in children

Bilingualism in children can be complex to understand, as many factors influence the child and the language acquisition process. Factors that can affect the language development of each child are:

- Language input

For language acquisition by a child, it is not only the language production that is essential but also the linguistic input, in other words, the comprehensible languages to which the child is exposed (Baker 121). A bilingual child is influenced by multiple linguistic inputs, and this also affects language development, for example, the dominance of languages may change. Furthermore, the amount and quality of these linguistic inputs are also influential (Bouko 105). In addition, the use of language is also a key factor. Because if one of the languages does not serve the child's communicative needs, it will not be used, and this will limit the development of that language (Harding-Esch and Riley 62–63).

- Gender

Gender is a factor that affects many areas of life. In childhood bilingualism, gender has only a minor influence. Comparing the two genders points to some differences at the beginning of speaking and the quantity of communication, but these disappear over time

and do not strictly apply to every child. Overall, gender has only a weak effect on overall language development (Barron-Hauwaert 91–102).

- Motivation

Motivation is one of the highly significant factors that can facilitate learning another language. Without the right motivation, the speed of learning decreases significantly. In the case of childhood bilingualism, three types of motivation influence the child. The initial motivation comes from the parents when they make the decision of bilingual upbringing and lead their children sufficiently to become bilingual. The environment in which the child grows up is seen as the secondary motivation. Finally, later in life, the individual must find the motivation to maintain the ability to use both languages, which is seen as the third type (Cunningham 124).

- Intelligence and memory

Now, intelligence and bilingualism have a reciprocal effect on each other, but compared to other factors, it is very difficult to discover exactly how this works. What is certain, however, is that good memory is very important in the case of bilingualism, and bilingualism itself contributes to better memory (Li 33).

- Attitude

Finally, the last influence on children's language acquisition is attitude. Attitude towards language is also one of the factors that can have a major impact on the use of both languages. In the case of bilingualism in children, the attitude of the parents and other members of the child's environment is influential and can have both positive and negative effects on language use. If a child feels a positive attitude from people who speak the languages, the acquisition process will also be faster. Therefore, it is important that the child does not feel bad when making a mistake, but that the parents point the child in the right direction as a part of the conversation and maintain a positive attitude toward learning the languages (Cunningham 87; Li 34).

2.3.3 **Typology of bilingual families**

For a deeper insight into the reality of growing up bilingual, it is necessary to understand the context and situation of the family. However, defining a bilingual family can be difficult, as each one depends on many factors, such as the parents' native languages, the majority language of the country, the languages spoken by the parents to each other, to the child, or in the community, the influence of other family members and the language in which the child is later educated at school (Baker and Jones 28). Nevertheless, four types of bilingual families can be distinguished and recognized in families in the following research (Harding-Esch and Riley 70–72):

1. Parents speak different languages, with one parent's language being the same as the majority language of the community and each parent speaking to the child in their native language.
2. Parents speak to the child in two different non-dominant languages and the child is exposed to the dominant language only outside the home.
3. Both parents speak the same language, which differs from the dominant language of the community, to which is the child exposed outside the home.
4. Parents speak to the child in both the dominant and non-dominant language of the community, so the child is exposed in the family to both.

2.3.4 **Methods for raising bilingual children**

Although a family can be classified according to a certain type, the choice of the language strategy itself is purely up to the parents and their situation. Regardless of whether a child becomes bilingual by a conscious decision of the parents, it is possible to discover various methods and strategies used in the family which lead the child to the acquisition of two languages. These methods provide an idea of what bilingualism looks like for a child in practice in everyday life and can also be a tool for parents who are trying to raise their children towards bilingualism. Additionally, they can have a future impact on the language development of the child. These are the most common strategies presented by Catherine Bouko and Una Cunningham (Bouko 25–28; Cunningham 31–47).

- One Parent – One Language

The basic method of bilingualism, recommended by most experts dealing with this phenomenon today, is One Parent – One Language. This means that both mother and father should speak only one language to the child, preferably, of course, their mother tongue.

- Time and Place

The Time and Place method, also called Domains of Use, stands for parents dividing the use of languages according to a specific time and place, where each language will be spoken. For example, at home during the week versus at home on the weekends and vacation.

- Minority Language at Home

In the method of Minority Language at Home parents choose to speak the minority language at home, while the majority language is spoken in the child's community outside the family (school, supermarket, playground, etc.).

- Two Parents – Two Languages

In the Two Parents – Two Languages strategy, parents use and interact with their children in both languages. The choice of language depends on many factors – the place, who else is involved in the discussion, and more. Both languages are used roughly equally. In this type of family, it is common for parents to be bilingual themselves.

- Utilizing Outside Resources

The next way of raising a bilingual child is called Utilizing Outside Resources. This method is used when neither parent speaks the second language. In this case, children can learn the second language utilizing resources such as language school, native babysitters, and playgroups.

- Going with the Flow

And the last method could be called Going with the Flow. This means having no special plan or structure. This strategy is frequently adopted by families, in which everyone is bilingual.

2.3.5 Bilingual siblings

In addition to the fundamental influence of parents, various linguistic inputs from the community, and other factors influence a child's bilingualism, communication between siblings can also affect language development. Barron-Hauwaert even claims, that “*some children spend more time with their siblings than with their parents, and a sibling can play the role of surrogate parent, teacher, playmate or friend*” (3). According to him, “*siblings are rather under-researched, compared to the vast amount of work done on the mother-child relationship and the effect of the peer group on children*” (2–3). Exactly how bilingual siblings communicate with each other outside parental influence is therefore not fully researched. When another family member arrives, the once strict rules can often change radically. Families evolve, and so do attitudes to language use. After the experience of raising their first child, parents can evaluate the success rate of their child’s language development and decide how to proceed with their siblings. In addition, older siblings influence their younger ones and can help in the acquisition of both languages (Barron-Hauwaert 40–41). It is not the parents, but the children themselves who choose to share a common language referred to as the preferred sibling language. However, the choice does not have to be conscious, often it is natural. It may be either one of the languages, both or even a combination of the two (Barron-Hauwaert 54–55).

2.3.6 Aspects related to language acquisition

Acquiring language at an early age is a complicated process that involves several aspects that children experience. One aspect associated with the stages of language development in bilingual children is the mixing of languages. It is an issue, that is very often addressed in the literature.

Firstly, the languages that an individual knows influence each other at various levels: pronunciation, morphology, syntax, word order, word meaning and phraseology, and spelling. This is related to the phenomenon of the “*transfer of elements from one language to the other*”, which is called interference (Hoffmann 95). It occurs not only in bilingual speakers but also in anyone learning a second language (Hamers and Blanc 41).

Secondly, the term interference is most often associated with the term code-mixing. According to Bhatia and Ritchie, it is the situation when “*bilingual children mix elements from both languages in the same utterance as soon as they can produce two-word utterances*” (40). This is a phenomenon that monolingual children do not experience and only affects bilingual ones (Bhatia and Ritchie 40). Initially, from the moment of being able to express two-word utterances, the child mixes the two languages, putting words from the second language into first-language sentences and vice versa, or even creating new words by combining expressions that mean the same thing in both languages. Both Una Cunningham and Colin Baker agree that the mixing of languages is natural and usually will eventually stop (Baker 90–91, 101; Cunningham 57–62). This phenomenon serves to help the child sort out the two languages and develop a system in them. Already around the age of three, but usually at about four, the bilingual child begins to distinguish strictly between languages, knows how to talk to parents, which language to use in the usual childhood community and which to use in the company of grandparents. The switching between the two language codes begins to be spontaneous and the awareness that they are different languages is clear. Why this phenomenon is highly discussed is that parents often think that their child is struggling with a certain speech disorder, which is not always the reality (Baker 90–91, 101–104; Cunningham 57–62).

2.3.7 Advantages, disadvantages, and prejudices of early bilingualism

Bilingualism in children is, among other things, a very controversial topic, with debates in the literature about its possible advantages and disadvantages. Many authors have asked whether bilingualism is beneficial or not (Myers-Scotton 337). From the point of view of the authors such as Bouko and Cunningham, who present mainly positive benefits of bilingualism, the following points can be noted (Bouko 15–17; Cunningham 65–67).

- Communication

The obvious advantage comes from the ability to communicate with a wider range of people. Thanks to the knowledge of two languages, a bilingual person can communicate with people from abroad in their native language.

- Multiculturalism

Bilingualism brings also deeper multiculturalism and a bilingual experience of the world. The individual understands not only languages but also both cultures and can easily tap into them (Chen and Padilla 6–8).

- Cognitive skills

In the area of cognitive skills and creativity, the studies are contradictory. However, bilingualism certainly has some effect on these abilities, whether positive, negative, or neutral. But in terms of the benefits of bilingualism, the positive effect on the development of cognitive skills can be noted, for example, the development of thinking, creativity, and sensitivity in communication. Bilingual children and individuals are more creative. Ongoing thinking in two languages is also an advantage of bilingualism (Leikin 2–5).

- Education

And the last but very important advantage especially for children and their parents is educational benefits. Thanks to bilingualism and the associated benefits mentioned above, there are also increased opportunities for higher education and, consequently, better employment, since the advantage of knowing two languages opens the opportunity for different jobs. Furthermore, people who already speak two languages find it easier to learn a third language.

Although most of the literature agrees on the positive effects of bilingualism, some negative influences of bilingualism have been noted, which depend on different variables, and the results reported by different authors are often partially contradictory. Bilingual children may be at a disadvantage as they may have a smaller vocabulary and expressive abilities in each language compared to monolingual children, but over time they are on an equal level and this fact has no profound effect (Bhatia and Ritchie 96; Pearson 25). It can be assumed that the disadvantages of bilingualism are related to increased language difficulties in children with language problems, reduced speech fluency or speech delay. However, studies do not show that these difficulties are necessarily caused by bilingualism (Bouko 18; Cunningham 65–77; Průcha 173). Another difficulty in the eyes of parents associated with early bilingualism may be the previously mentioned mixing of languages, but this is natural and will diminish over

time (Cunningham 166). A final aspect that is associated with the disadvantages of early bilingualism is the feeling of being different. Children who speak a different language from the majority language may become targets of attention, feel like they don't belong in the community, or feel ashamed of their second language. On the other hand, other children may even envy bilingual ones for speaking more languages than they do. In addition, the child during growing up and later in adulthood may experience an identity crisis of not being sure to which culture they belong (Cunningham 67–69; Grosjean).

Childhood bilingualism is surrounded by various prejudices, which have not yet been fully proven but influence the view on this phenomenon.

- Bilingual children are confused

When considering raising a bilingual child, parents are often concerned about whether their children might feel confused because of learning two languages. This confusion could be seen as mixing languages, choosing the wrong language according to the corresponding environment, and thus being unable to distinguish between the two languages. However, studies show that in most cases children are sensitive enough to choose the correct language and, apart from any initial complications, are not confused (Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams 1–2).

- Bilingual children translate in their head one language into another

One aspect that has not yet been fully elucidated is whether bilingual children and individuals translate in their heads from one language to another. In other words, if acquiring two languages they create one unique language system, two parallel interdependent systems, or two independent but cooperating systems. The organization and cooperation between them are not sufficiently documented. This aspect of cross-language translation can help to further understand bilingualism in children and what they experience (Flocchia 4).

- Every bilingual is fully and equally fluent in both languages

Truly balanced bilingualism, known also as equilingualism, is a rare phenomenon. Bilingual children are affected by all the language inputs around them and other factors such as frequency of language use, which often cause an unbalanced level of language proficiency (Bouko 21; Myers-Scotton 38; Summer 2).

- Bilingualism causes learning disabilities or poorer school performance

No research has ever shown a causal link between bilingualism and specific learning disabilities. The group of children with such problems includes, of course, bilingual children. However, these disorders are certainly not caused by bilingualism itself. Bilingualism causing problems for school success might be caused by the lack of mastery of one of the languages. If a child has to master the school curriculum in his weaker language, there is a risk that this will have a negative impact on his academic performance. Bilingualism itself is therefore not the problem and the situation can be addressed by encouraging the development of the weaker language rather than eliminating it (Bouko 20; Cunningham 65–66).

2.4 Summary

To sum up the review of the existing literature in the context of early bilingualism in children, it can be stated that early bilingualism is a broad topic that has been studied from many different perspectives. However, not many sufficient studies have been conducted to show the actual perspectives of those who have an authentic experience with early bilingualism, i.e., parents and bilingual children, and to compare their perspectives. Each of the studies and theories presented in the literature is of fundamental importance for further research, in which these theoretical concepts are explored and interconnected with the findings from families experiencing early bilingualism in children.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was used for the study of realistic perspectives of growing up bilingually. A case study research design methodology was applied to enable research of a specific group of bilingual individuals and their parents and used to understand this complex issue in a real-life context. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used, i.e., a mixed-methods approach was adopted (Williams 70). A questionnaire with additional interviews was used as a tool for data collection.

3.2 Data collection

A questionnaire served as the main method of data collection. It was chosen because of ease of construction, time saving, financial ease and efficiency of effort, which are the advantages of the questionnaire. In contrast, it has its limitations, which include the lack of comprehensiveness of the questions and the possible unreliability of the respondents' answers. The following data were collected through the questionnaire: factual data used to find out who the respondents are, behavioural data asking about respondents' present and past, and attitudinal data trying to find out what people think (Dörnyei and Taguchi 5).

For this study of the perspectives of both parents and bilingual children, the questionnaire, see Appendix, was separated into two sections according to these two groups of respondents whose questionnaire questions mirrored and related to each other. To maintain the respondent's focus, the survey took around 30 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was designed as semi-structured in the form of two types of questions: closed-ended and open-ended items. The format was constructed through the online survey creator, Microsoft Forms.

The questionnaire was structured into the following parts, see Appendix. First, the title followed by the general instructions, explaining the purpose of the research, the length and form of the following questionnaire, the emphasis that there are no wrong answers, the confidentiality clause, and acknowledgements. Second, the questionnaire items with specific instructions introducing each task and additional information if

needed. The individual questions were ordered in a logical sequence. Lastly, the Final “Thank You” for the respondent’s cooperation and time.

The individual questions were chosen in the context of the research objectives. Their organization was logically divided according to the individual themes. The initial question was a distinction between whether the respondent was a bilingual individual or a parent of a bilingual child. According to the answer to this question, the respondent was taken to the appropriate section of the questionnaire. If the respondent held both categories, he or she was asked to complete the questionnaire twice from different perspectives.

- Section for parents of the bilingual child(ren)

The first section was addressed to parents of bilingual individuals and consisted of a total of 34 questions. The first part of this section consisted of questions seeking information about the languages of the parents, their children, and the community in which they raised their children. This section gained an initial overview of the situation in which bilingual education took place and what languages influenced the bilingual individual. The second part of the section for parents raising bilingual children took a closer look at the language acquisition process itself. The next part included questions to ascertain the current situation of bilingualism in their children from the parent's perspective. This was central to obtaining answers to the research objectives and was, therefore, most extensive. Finally, the last part of the section for parents was devoted to opinions, perspectives, and retrospective views on bilingualism. The last question asked for the respondent's personal information, which, although not mentioned elsewhere, served to provide an overview of each parent as well as to facilitate the matching of the parent's and child's responses.

- Section for bilingual individuals

The second section was addressed to bilingual individuals and consisted of 46 questions. This section was longer than the previous one, as bilingual individuals themselves can provide the closest insight into their lives. The first part was similarly designed as in the previous section. It provided a picture of the respondent's situation and helped to get baseline information relevant to the research. The second part of this section was devoted to language learning and the process of the development of bilingualism. This section complemented the parents' responses and helped to gain a

second perspective on the language acquisition process. The next part was devoted to obtaining more information about the process of language use, for example, the current situation and state of the languages, the frequency of use, and any possible language-related problems. This section contained longer answers expressing the language use from the perspective of bilingual individuals. The last part coincided with the parent's section when the respondent was asked about his/her own opinions, experiences, or advice regarding bilingualism. This was again followed by a final question where the respondent filled in their personal details. For this section addressed to bilingual individuals this was more important as age or gender obtained by this question may be influential in bilingualism.

The questionnaire was carried out through online administration by email. The reasons for using an online form of examination were easy access, saving time, and no costs. Additionally, the researcher's presence was not needed when the questionnaires were completed. At the beginning of each questionnaire, all necessary information was explained, and each question was thoroughly stated. Basic ethical principles of data collection were followed to ensure that individual respondents felt safe. And along with the submission of the questionnaire was given consent for the processing and use of the data.

Once the questionnaire was created, a pilot questionnaire was sent out to one family before being sent out to all participants. The purpose of this action was to test the feasibility of the survey and identify any possible problems through the respondents' feedback.

In addition, interviews with 4 respondents took place. After obtaining the data from the questionnaires, additional questions were prepared to clarify any unclear points or to fill in insufficient information, which were then clarified by the respondents. To better understand the results of the questionnaires, their responses were supplemented by semi-structured follow-up interviews (Dörnyei and Taguchi 109–110). They were conducted with one parent and three bilingual individuals. These respondents were contacted based on ambiguities or incompleteness in their responses required for this research. The interviews were conducted online via Skype. With the consent of each respondent, all of them were recorded and the duration of one meeting was on average 5 minutes. This provided additional information that led to a greater understanding of

some answers from the questionnaire. Unfortunately, not all the respondents could be interviewed because some of them live far away or did not want to take part in the interview process.

3.3 Respondents

The sample consisted of fourteen respondents, whose answers have been anonymised and who have consented to the processing of the data. The selection of respondents was not random, but rather purposive. To fit the characteristics of this study, opportunity or convenience sampling was used to select participants for this study (Dörnyei and Taguchi 61). A prerequisite for participation in the research was an experience with early bilingualism, either from the perspective of a parent raising a bilingual child or of the bilingual individual. The total number of respondents represented 8 families. The research was conducted in January 2020. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 36.5 minutes. A total of 18 questionnaires were administered, but only 14 questionnaires were returned. The return rate was thus 77.7 %. The sample of research respondents consisted of parents – 42.9 %, i.e., 6 respondents and bilingual individuals – 57.1 %, i.e., 8 respondents (see figure 1). It is interesting to note that 1 bilingual individual is also a parent of bilingual children. It is important to note that in one case the children were not able to complete the questionnaires, but in some of the research questions, their responses are recorded according to the information provided by the parent. It is also notable that in 2 cases only bilingual individuals responded, which made it impossible to compare their views with the views of their parents.

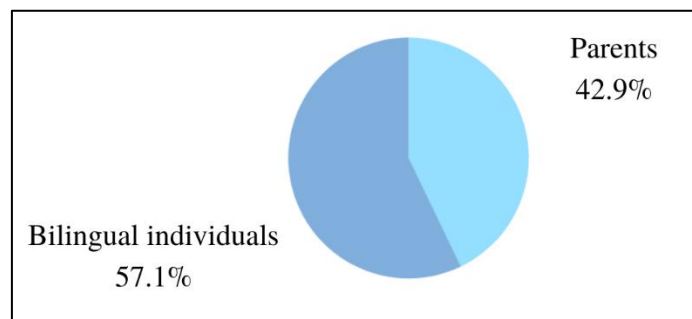


Figure 1: Description of the research sample

Overall, 11 females and 3 males participated in the study, of which bilingual parents were 5 females and 1 male, while bilingual individuals were 6 females and 2 males (see figure 2).

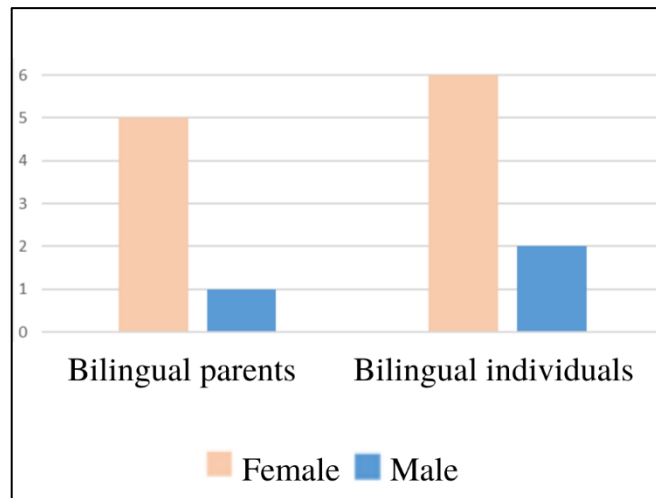


Figure 2: Description of the research sample by gender

Lastly, the most important thing was to find out in which languages were the individuals bilingual. In all cases, it was a combination of the following three languages: English, German, and Czech. The combinations of English with Czech and English with German have both been seen in only one case, while a combination of German and Czech was seen in 7 cases (see figure 3).

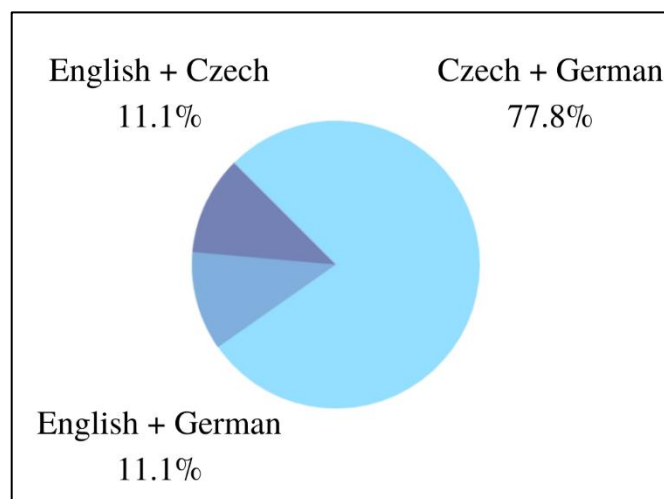


Figure 3: The languages in which the individuals are bilingual

3.4 Data processing

3.4.1 Questionnaire data

The questionnaire response data were exported from Microsoft Forms into a Microsoft Excel file that contained all the data. The subsequent coding enabled to process and categorise the data into two thematic groups: parents and bilinguals (Gibbs 144). Prior to analysing the data, it was also important to determine their quality. This next step called data cleaning involved correcting various errors and inaccuracies in the responses, for example correcting grammatical mistakes or translating into English. This can be seen as a necessary stage of data preparation before the analysis itself (Dörnyei and Taguchi 88–89). The following step can be summarised under data manipulation, which also needed to be done before the analysis. The data were transformed into one uniform format, which was a text in a Microsoft Word document (Dörnyei and Taguchi 89–91). This data was further transcribed and categorized according to individual families and main themes. The closed-ended questions were easier to code and where appropriate, converted to a numerical scale and entered in a table or graph. The open-ended questions from the questionnaire or interviews were coded through qualitative data analysis, which enabled the processing of more complicated answers that varied with each respondent (Gibbs 1–2). These types of questions were summarised, key points were identified and for some, it was possible to further code them as quantitative data, others were analysed as follows and grouped into meaningful categories. These responses were often more subjective and more challenging to process. These stages helped to divide and sort the individual data, making subsequent analysis clearer and easier.

3.4.2 Interview data

Additional data from the interviews were transcribed into textual form and added to the relevant data from the questionnaire to supplement and further clarify it. The information obtained from the interviews complemented the questionnaire responses. Since this was a small amount of data, directly linked to the questionnaire data, which supplemented and modified them, they were further presented and analysed together.

3.5 Summary

This research exploring the phenomenon of early bilingualism among specific respondents was conducted as a case study combining quantitative and qualitative research. The main method of data collection was a questionnaire in combination with additional interviews, which provided suitable data for the following analysis. The respondents in this research represent bilingual families from the perspectives of both parents and bilingual individuals and were chosen based on their experience with early bilingualism in children. After collecting data from suitable respondents, the data was analysed, and the results of this analysis are presented in the following chapter.

4 Analysis

4.1 Data

The present section introduces data collected across eight bilingual families via questionnaires and interviews. Each family is characterised through a visual summary which is further developed with a description of the specific linguistic context.

4.1.1 Family A

General Information

Family A consisted of 4 members – mother (native language Czech), father (native language also Czech), son, and daughter. This family was presented by 3 respondents – mother, son (19 years old), and daughter (17 years old). They live in Switzerland, where the majority language is German. The children are both bilingual in Czech and German. The typology and usage of languages for communication in this family are described in the following figure (see figure 4). Some of the languages are more frequently used in this family and these are highlighted in bold. Respondents from this family are underlined. Moreover, the country in which this family lives and its majority language is also shown. The figure describes the communication between children and parents, among siblings and with others they interact with, such as grandparents, friends, and others. Furthermore, it is illustrated in what languages the family communicates in society.

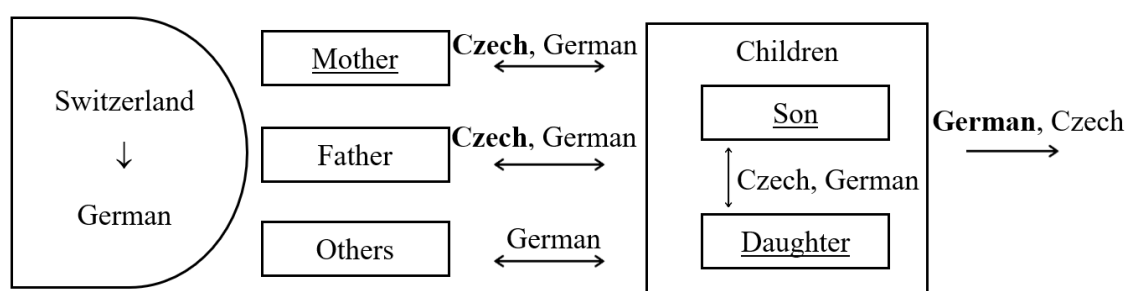


Figure 4: Family A description

Process of language acquisition

The strategy of this family indicated a combination of methods used at home, which were One Person – One Language and Minority Language at Home. Both children went through the phase of mixing languages, which lasted approximately from

2 to 6 years. These children experienced speech delay and other speech problems connected with pronunciation and poorer vocabulary, which was limited compared to other monolingual children. These problems appeared at the onset of their bilingualism. Furthermore, both bilingual individuals reported that they did not translate languages between themselves in their heads.

Bilingualism of the children

The type of bilingualism of both children was classified as active and dominant, characterized by a better level of German, in which they are also more confident. They were formally educated only in German. Both siblings consider both languages to be their native and do not have an accent in any language, but they both use only German in everyday communication. The son is fluent in both languages, while the daughter is only in one. The abilities of their language skills are identical, so they are displayed in the following table together. The skills that were acquired in both languages are marked with a checkmark, those that were not with a cross (see table 1).

Speak fluently	✓
Read and comprehend	✓
Listen and comprehend	✓
Understand native speakers	✓
Understand songs	✓
Write well	✗

Table 1: Language skills – daughter and son of family A

Both daughter and son reported that school education, in general, was positively influenced by their bilingualism. Learning other languages was a bit easier for the daughter compared to other monolingual children, while the son didn't notice any effect. Using and learning both languages was for them no problem. They predominantly learned the languages from their family and friends. The family was helpful to them because of speaking the minority language at home, through talking, correcting mistakes, and reading children's books. The daughter improved her language skills not only thanks to her parents but also through the friends with whom she communicated. The following figures present the means of help in the language acquisition for both siblings separately (see figures 5 and 6). The elements that could be

helpful in language acquisition were graded from not at all (red), on average (orange), to the most (green), according to the self-assessment and reflection of the bilingual individuals.

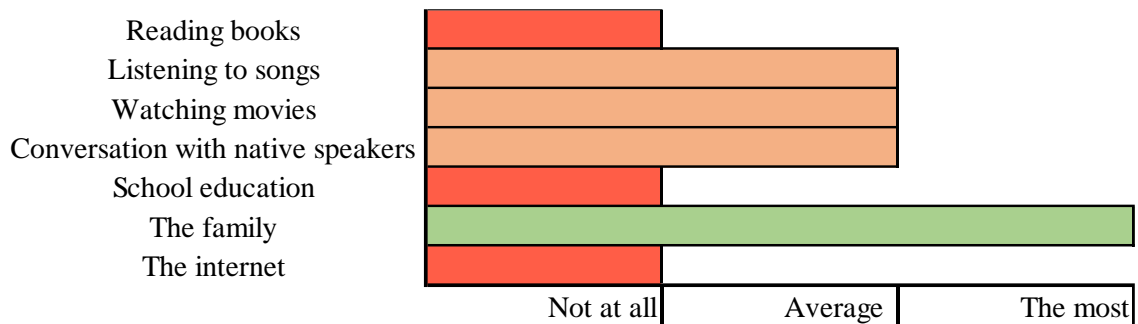


Figure 5: Helpful elements – son of family A

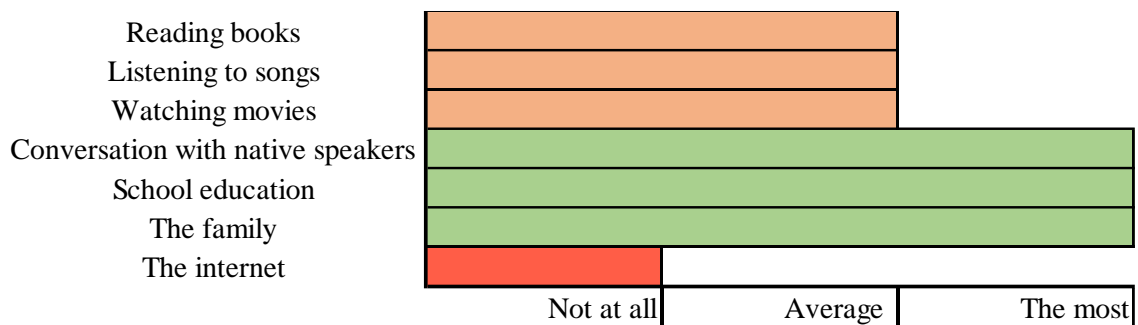


Figure 6: Helpful elements – daughter of family A

Advantages, disadvantages, and observations

From the point of view of the mother, bilingualism is beneficial for her children, because they can think separately in 2 languages and learn much easier other languages, which is perceived from her experience. As a possible disadvantage was mentioned, that at the beginning the children got sometimes very frustrated if they couldn't express exactly their thoughts or their needs. This parent believes that she was successful in raising a bilingual individual a wouldn't do anything differently. From the point of view of the children, bilingualism is beneficial for them in communication skills, it gains respect from other nations and because of the ability to speak two languages in general. No disadvantages were mentioned. Both siblings are considering raising their children bilingually too, and their advice to other parents is to talk a lot.

4.1.2 Family B

General Information

Family B consisted of 4 members – mother (native language Czech), father (native language also Czech), son, and daughter. It was represented by 2 respondents – mother and daughter (48 years old). This family lives in Germany with the majority language German. In this case, bilingualism is a combination of German and English. The following figure shows the usage of languages for communication in this family (see figure 7).

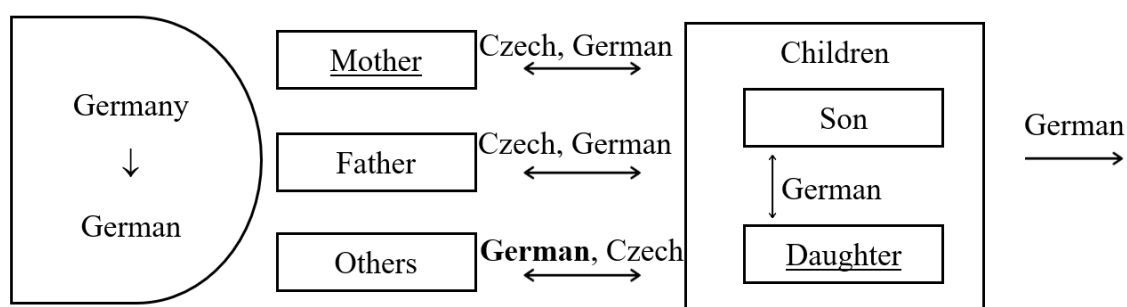


Figure 7: Family B description

Process of language acquisition

The strategy of this family was a method of Minority Language at Home. No speech delay was noted. The daughter had no language problems, and she stated that her mind does not translate languages with each other. However, compared to other monolingual children, she experienced a more limited vocabulary. There were no problems with switching languages.

Bilingualism of the daughter

The type of bilingualism could be classified as dominant and active bilingualism, with a better level of German, in which the daughter is also more confident. She has an accent in the second language, which is Czech. She was formally educated only in German, which she uses more in communication. However, she considers both languages as her native. Her language skills mastered in both languages are displayed in the following table (see table 2).

Speak fluently	✓
Read and comprehend	✓
Listen and comprehend	✓
Understand native speakers	✓
Understand songs	✓
Write well	✓

Table 2: Language skills – daughter of family B

This bilingual individual believes it has been easier for her to learn other languages compared to other non-bilingual students and bilingualism positively affected her school education. Speaking and learning two languages was not a problem for her. Her parents supported her language acquisition by speaking and reading Czech at home while she communicated in German outside the home. Besides her parents, she was supported by family friends and her aunt, who spoke Czech with her. The following figure shows the scale of the elements that she considered helpful in language acquisition (see figure 8).

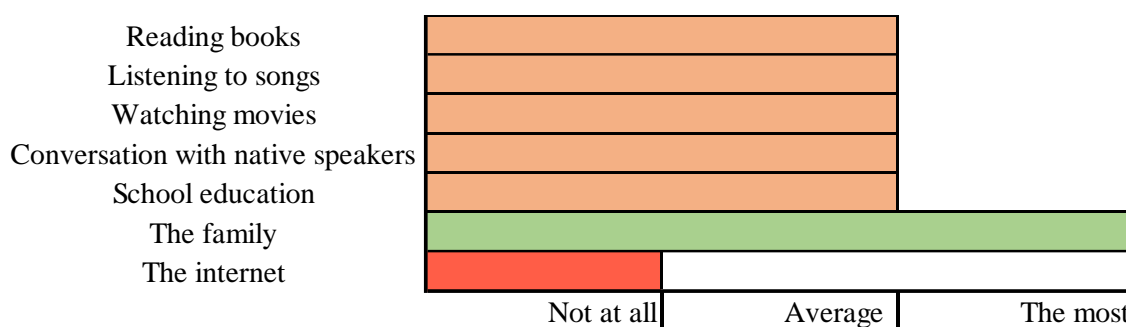


Figure 8: Helpful elements – daughter of family B

Advantages, disadvantages, and observations

As the mother stated, the many benefits of bilingualism include the ability to communicate in more than one country, and no disadvantages were mentioned. The mother thinks she was successful in raising her children bilingually, but if she could, she would have engaged in more writing and reading with them to improve their grammar. The bilingual individual sees the benefits of bilingualism in communication skills, the ability to translate and more possibilities in life. No disadvantages were

noticed. She stated that she will raise her children bilingually and her advice is to separate the languages consequently.

4.1.3 Family C

General Information

Family C consisted of 5 members – mother (native language English), father (native language German), and 3 sons. This family was represented by 2 respondents – father, who is himself a bilingual individual (combination of German and Czech), and his older son (20 years old). In this family are also two other sons, but they were too young to complete the survey. This family lives in the United Arab Emirates, where the majority language is English, but they moved there from Germany with the majority language German. Bilingualism occurs here in a combination of German and English. The usage of languages is displayed in the following figure (see figure 9).

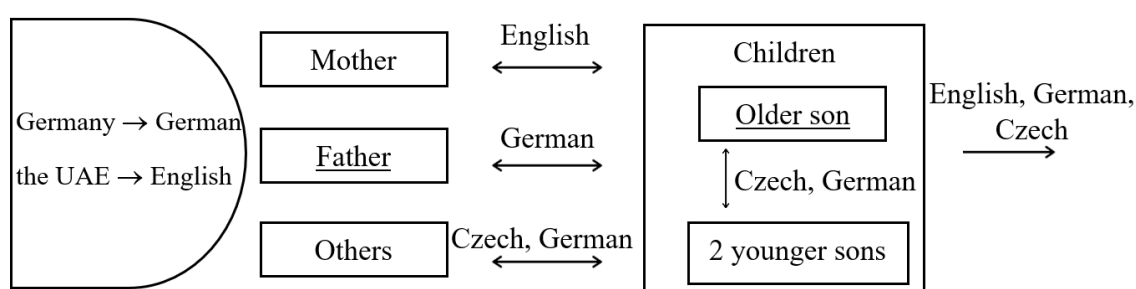


Figure 9: Family C description

Process of language acquisition

The method of language acquisition was stated as Two Parents – Two Languages. From the moment when the children started to talk, till the age of 4 roughly, the language mixing phase was ongoing. No language problems were noted, and the children were able to switch languages as the situation required. The eldest son stated that his mind does not translate language between themselves.

Bilingualism of the eldest son

This family's type of bilingualism was classified by the parent as active and dominant bilingualism, with a better level of English. However, the eldest son stated, that he knows both languages at the same level, and his fluency and confidence are on the same level, even though he has an accent in the second language. He considers

German to be his native language. He was formally educated in both languages and uses them on an everyday basis equally. As can be seen in the following table, he is capable of all the language skills in both languages (see table 3).

Speak fluently	✓
Read and comprehend	✓
Listen and comprehend	✓
Understand native speakers	✓
Understand songs	✓
Write well	✓

Table 3: Language skills – son of family C

During his education, he felt that he had an advantage in learning languages over other monolingual children and bilingualism had a positive impact on his overall education. He learned languages mostly from school and it was easy for him. His parents encouraged his bilingualism by speaking both languages with him. Apart from his parents, he had to use both languages to communicate with his friends. What was helpful and to what extent in the acquisition of two languages is shown in the following figure (see figure 10).

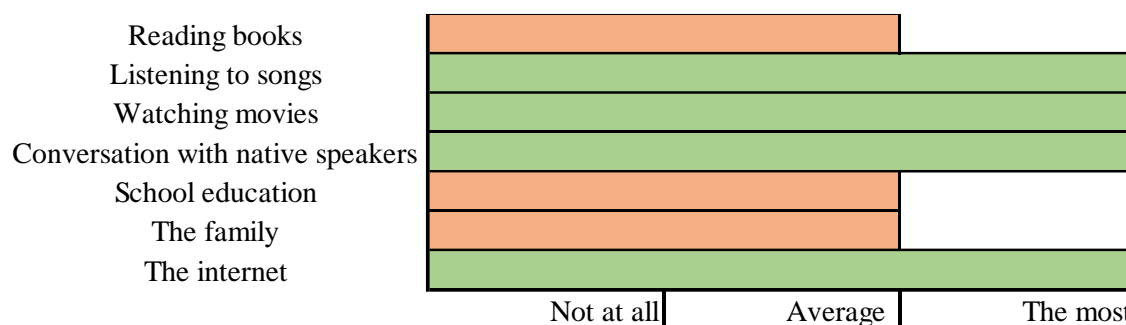


Figure 10: Helpful elements – son of family C

Advantages, disadvantages, and observations

The father believes that bilingualism brings benefits for life in general and helps in the development of the brain, while no disadvantages were mentioned. From the parent's point of view, raising bilingual children was successful and he wouldn't have done anything differently. The son sees benefits in communication since he can take a closer connection when talking to a person in a different language. His language skills

assist him in better job opportunities. No disadvantages were stated. He is considering raising his children bilingually, and his advice is for parents to speak both languages with their children.

4.1.4 Family D

General Information

Family D consisted of 4 members – mother (native language Czech), father (native language again Czech), son, and daughter. It was represented by 2 respondents – mother and her daughter (47 years old). This family of four lives in Germany, where the majority language is German. The children are bilingual in Czech and German. The language usage of this family is presented in the next figure (see figure 11). More frequently used languages are again highlighted in bold.

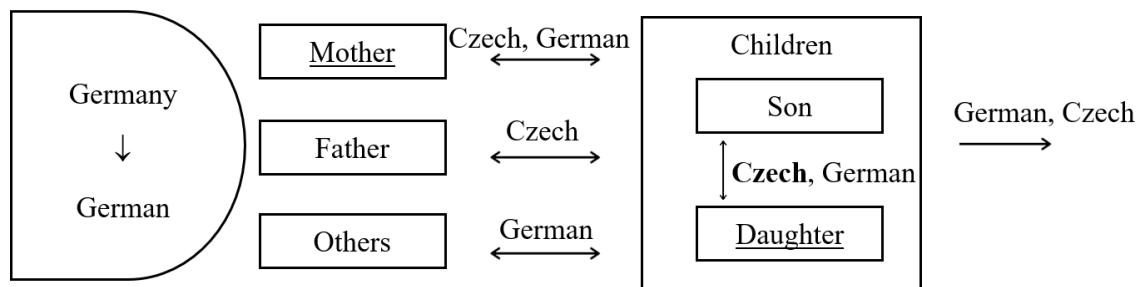


Figure 11: Family D description

Process of language acquisition

The process of educating bilingual children was described as a combination of methods One Person – One Language, Minority Language at Home and Time and Place. Children of family D didn't go through the phase of mixing languages nor have experienced other problems. They switched languages easily according to their present environment. However, the daughter assessed her vocabulary as smaller concerning that of other monolingual children. She stated that her mind doesn't translate the second language into the first.

Bilingualism of the daughter

The type of bilingualism in this family was classified as dominant, with a better level of German, which is considered the native language of the daughter. She is fluent

in both languages and uses them both actively but feels that her German is better, in which she was educated and is more confident. This language is used more for communication. She has an accent in Czech. Learning two different languages from her point of view was easy. Apart from writing well, she is competent in all language skills, which is shown in the following table (see table 4).

Speak fluently	✓
Read and comprehend	✓
Listen and comprehend	✓
Understand native speakers	✓
Understand songs	✓
Write well	✗

Table 4: Language skills – daughter of family D

For her, learning other foreign languages wasn't easier in comparison with other schoolmates. Overall, she didn't notice any effect on her school education. She learned the second language predominantly from her friends, but her parents supported her bilingualism. The other means of help in language acquisition are shown in the following figure (see figure 12).

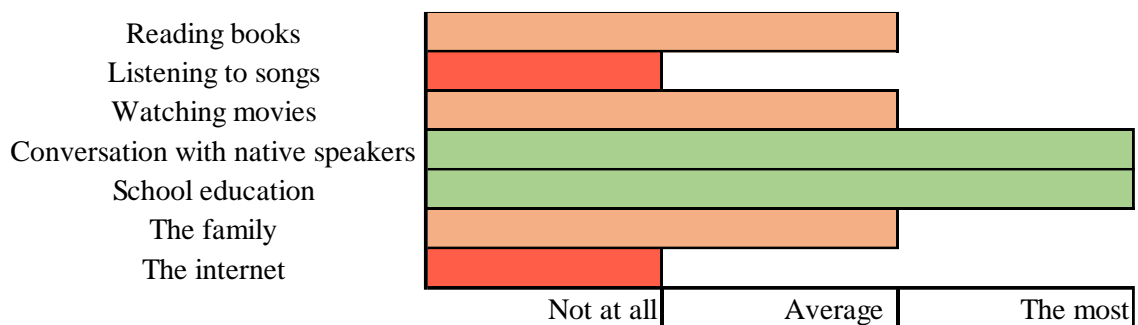


Figure 12: Helpful elements – daughter of family D

Advantages, disadvantages, and observations

The mother of family D stated that the advantage of bilingualism is to be able to communicate in the parents' home country and with relatives living in another country too. As the preceding parent, this mother thinks, she was successful in raising a bilingual individual. She wouldn't do anything differently. The daughter didn't mention

any disadvantages since bilingualism is only beneficial for her in society and in general. She is considering raising her children bilingually and her advice is to just do it.

4.1.5 Family E

General Information

Family E consisted of 4 members – mother (native language Czech), father (native language German), son, and daughter. This family was represented by 2 respondents – mother and daughter (19 years old). The son did not want to participate in the research. This family lives in Switzerland with the majority language being German. The children are bilingual in Czech and German, and the usage of these languages is shown below in the following figure (see figure 13).

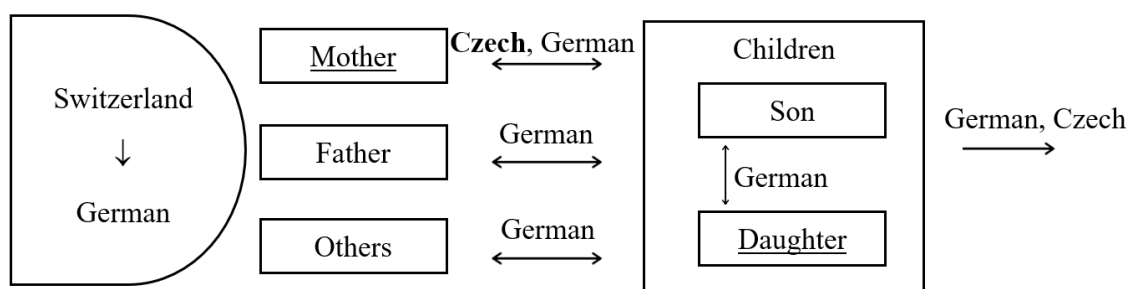


Figure 13: Family E description

Process of language acquisition

Children in this family were led to bilingualism following the method of One Person – One Language. In the period from 2 to 10 years, they went through the phase of language mixing. Other than that, they had no language problems and switched between them seamlessly according to the situation. They do not translate languages with each other in their heads.

Bilingualism of the daughter

The dominant bilingualism occurs again in this family, with better proficiency in German, in which the daughter was formally educated. She considers both languages to be her native, uses them both actively and does not have an accent in either one. She is fluent in both languages but stated she is more confident in German and uses it in communication more. She feels normal when using both languages, but sometimes she

can't remember some words. In the following table acquired language skills in both languages are shown (see table 5).

Speak fluently	✓
Read and comprehend	X
Listen and comprehend	✓
Understand native speakers	✓
Understand songs	X
Write well	X

Table 5: Language skills – daughter of family E

The daughter believes that bilingualism helped her out a lot in learning other languages in comparison to other monolingual children and affected her school education positively. Her parents encouraged bilingualism the most by her mother teaching her Czech. Furthermore, it was her grandparents who helped her. Other means of help are presented in the following figure (see figure 14).

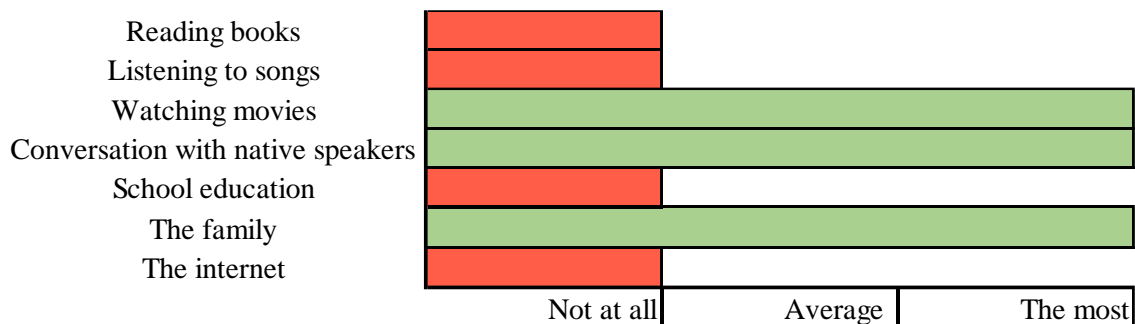


Figure 14: Helpful elements – daughter of family E

Advantages, disadvantages, and observations

The mother considers bilingualism beneficial in many ways, offering many opportunities. No disadvantages were mentioned. She believes she was successful in raising bilingual individuals. However, if it was possible, she would be more consistent and put them in a Czech school in Switzerland, which was not open before. For the daughter, learning two languages was helpful in many ways. Her language skills benefited her in learning other languages in school and she thinks travelling will be easier too. Again, no disadvantages were noted. She also wants to raise her children bilingually and her tip is to just do it.

4.1.6 Family F

General Information

Family F consisted of 4 members – mother (native language German), father (native language German), son, and daughter. This family was presented only by a bilingual daughter (19 years old) since her brother and parents did not want to participate in this research. This family lives in Germany with the majority language German. Bilingualism in this family is a combination of German and Czech and how the languages are used for communication is displayed in the following figure (see figure 15).

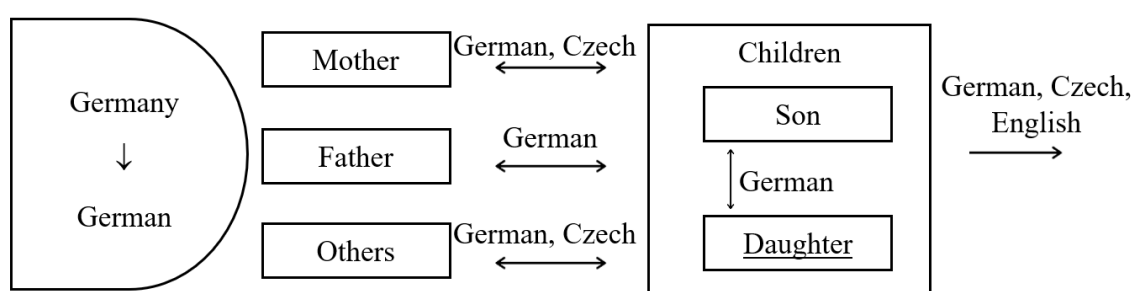


Figure 15: Family F description

Process of language acquisition

This respondent does not recall any special method or strategy from her childhood, which is known as the method of Going with the Flow. She always had problems with grammar in the language, but she did not notice any other language-related difficulties. She is of the opinion, that she has a smaller vocabulary available to her in each language in comparison to other native speakers. She is the only respondent that stated that her mind translates the second language into the first.

Bilingualism of the daughter

In the family F is bilingualism classified as dominant and active, with better knowledge of German, which is mentioned as a native and more frequently used language. The daughter is not fluent in both languages and has an accent in Czech. Even though she was educated at school only in German, she feels confident in both languages. Speaking and learning two different languages at the same time was no problem for her. In the following table, her language skills mastered in both languages are shown (see table 6).

Speak fluently	X
Read and comprehend	✓
Listen and comprehend	✓
Understand native speakers	✓
Understand songs	✓
Write well	X

Table 6: Language skills – daughter of family F

Learning other languages was not different for her compared to other monolingual children and she did not notice any effect on her school education in general. Her parents supported her language acquisition, but since her father didn't speak Czech, they spoke mostly German at home. However, her grandma and her friends helped her in the acquisition of the second language. The following items in the table were also to some extent useful for this bilingual individual in her language acquisition (see figure 16).

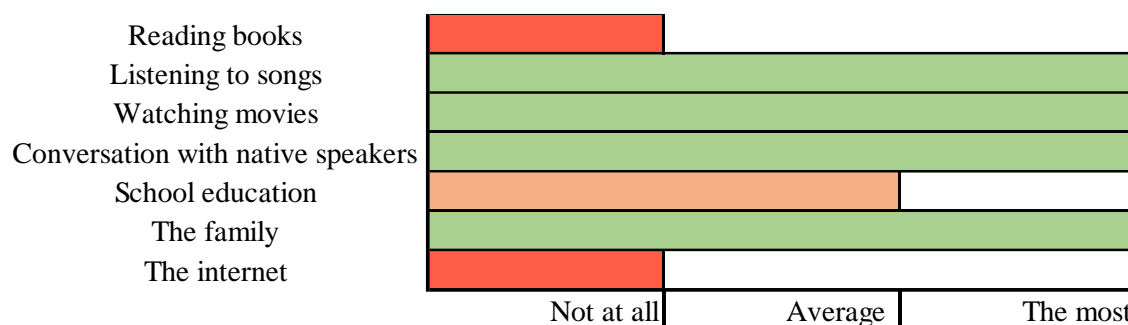


Figure 16: Helpful elements – daughter of family F

Advantages, disadvantages, and observations

In this family, only the point of view of the daughter was presented. She stated that she is grateful for being taught the languages because she can talk to people from different countries, which is seen as an advantage. She did not mention any disadvantages. If possible, she also wants to raise her children bilingually, because it could be helpful for them in future.

4.1.7 Family G

General Information

Family G consisted of 3 members – mother (native language Czech), father (native language also Czech), and daughter. This family was again presented only by the bilingual individual, a daughter who is an only child (19 years old). This does not enable a comparison with the parent's perspective, but at least provides an insight into the life of another bilingual person. The family G lives in Switzerland, where the majority language is German. Bilingualism in this family is a combination of German and Czech. The languages used for communication are displayed in the next figure. Both parents preferred to speak primarily one of the languages with their daughter, which was Czech (see figure 17).

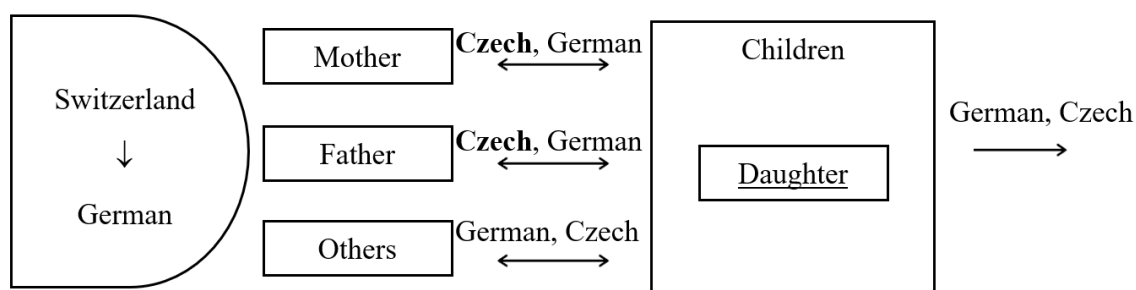


Figure 17: Family G description

Process of language acquisition

This family followed the method of Minority Language at Home. The daughter experienced the stage of mixing languages. Except for grammar problems and poorer vocabulary, she didn't experience any other language-related difficulties and could switch languages smoothly. Furthermore, her mind doesn't translate the second language into the first one.

Bilingualism of the daughter

The type of bilingualism was again classified as active and dominant, with better knowledge of German, in which she was educated and uses for communication more. Both languages were defined as her native with the same level of fluency and confidence and no accent. For her, learning and speaking two different languages was normal. The language skills acquired in both languages are shown in the following table (see table 7).

Speak fluently	✓
Read and comprehend	✓
Listen and comprehend	✓
Understand native speakers	✓
Understand songs	✓
Write well	X

Table 7: Language skills – daughter of family G

Learning other foreign languages was easier for her compared to other monolingual children, but overall, she did not notice any effect on her school education. Her parents predominantly supported her language acquisition, which can be seen in the following chart along with other elements that were of some assistance in learning languages (see figure 18).

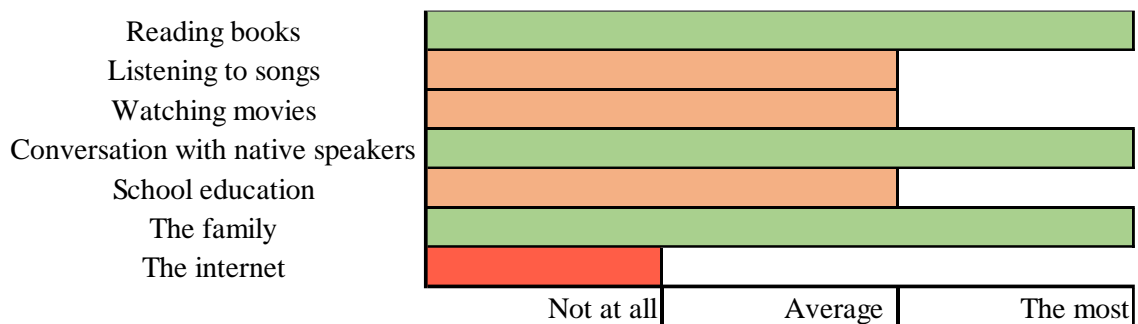


Figure 18: Helpful elements – daughter of family G

Advantages, disadvantages, and observations

In this family are again showed the observations only of the daughter. Her language skills benefited her in learning other foreign languages and in travelling. The ability to know more languages is seen as an advantage and no disadvantages were found. She is considering raising her children bilingually and her advice to other parents is to read a lot to and with the children and use the method of One Person – One Language.

4.1.8 Family H

General Information

Family H consisted of 4 members – mother (native language Czech), father (native language English), and 2 sons. This family was represented only by the mother of two bilingual sons, who are too young to complete the survey. This family lives in the United Kingdom in Scotland with the majority language English and the children are bilingual in English and Czech. The languages used in the communication of this family are displayed in the following figure (see figure 19).

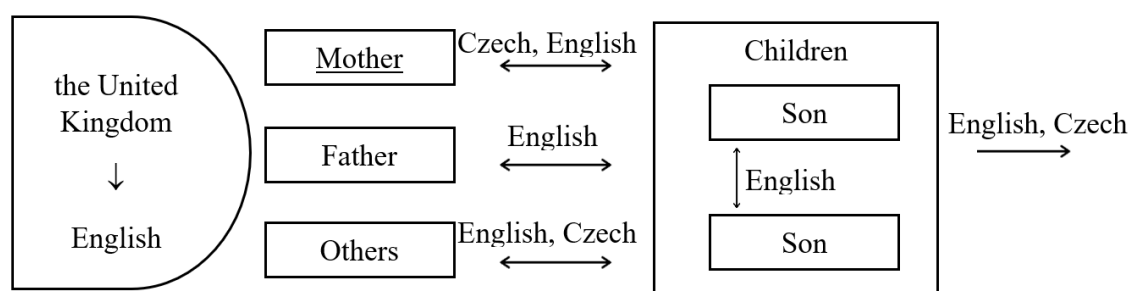


Figure 19: Family H description

Process of language acquisition

Since the mother speaks both languages to the children and the father only one, the method of education was classified by her as Two Parents – Two Languages with elements of other types of strategies. Children of family F didn't go through the phase of mixing languages and didn't experience speech delay or any other language difficulties. Moreover, they switch languages easily according to the environment, in which they found themselves.

Bilingualism of the children

For these children is characteristic dominant bilingualism, with English being more fluent. They are encouraged by their parents to become bilingual. Since the children were too young for participating in this research, no further information about the state of their bilingualism was gained.

Advantages, disadvantages, and observations

From the mother's point of view, bilingualism is beneficial since it allows her children to communicate with both families and discover different cultures. She

believes bilingual people tend to be more creative and flexible. Also, they can be more open-minded, and they find it easier to focus on a variety of tasks simultaneously. No disadvantages were mentioned. She considers her raising of bilingual children successful, but if she could, she would speak Czech to her children all the time.

4.1.9 Data Summary

To summarize this section, the subject of the research was eight families in which the raising of bilingual children occurred. The bilingualism of these children began in early childhood, and they learned both languages simultaneously. In all cases, they were functional families in which both parents took care of the children and helped their children to learn two languages. Even though each family is unique, and so are the bilingual individuals themselves, certain similarities can be found between them. The individual sections within each family presented data that were thematically related and connected. The perspectives on the different areas related to bilingualism in these families are shared by parents and children in some situations and diverged in others, which provides interesting insights and is explored in the following analysis.

4.2 Data Analysis

This section presents the data analysis, providing an insight into the perspectives of parents and bilingual children according to trends in responses and a comparison of these two viewpoints on life with bilingualism in children. The organization is around the main themes, according to which the questionnaire was designed. Moreover, this section offers a comparison of the interpreted findings with the theoretical concepts provided in the section literature review.

4.2.1 The family environment

The family environment a child grows up in can have a big impact (Baker and Jones 28; Průcha 167). Bilingualism in the families of this research is characterized as simultaneous early bilingualism that took place in families of different typologies (Harding-Esch and Riley 70–72). In all cases, parents spoke to their children only in their mother tongue or a combination of it with another language that the children were acquiring. The majority language of the country was always the same as the language used by one or both parents to communicate with their children. Thus, the children always acquired one language identical to the majority language of the country. It is clear from the data that the children were strongly influenced not only by their parents but also by other linguistic inputs from their environment that affected their later level of language proficiency. This fact is supported by the literature which cites language inputs as one of the most important factors influencing bilingualism in children (Baker 121; Bouko 49, 105). In the sample of bilingual individuals in this research, primarily the influence of the majority language to which the children were exposed outside the home can be observed. This finding is related to the state of the language proficiency that may have been influenced by this factor. Furthermore, according to the data, the most frequent choice of method leading children to bilingualism was made by parents most naturally, according to their language abilities and situation. Compared to the children's view of these methods, bilinguals often did not even remember them in retrospect. This can be interpreted as the methods and strategies chosen were natural and did not pose any problem for them. Next, most of the families in this study had more than one child. Although most often only one of the siblings participated in the research, the language used by the siblings to communicate with each other was also examined. Less than half of the siblings spoke both their languages among themselves,

while the rest chose only one of them, which mostly coincided with the majority language of the country. Therefore, it is not possible to draw a uniform view about language use among siblings from the data collected, but again it is possible to observe a certain influence of the majority language of the country in which the bilingual individuals grew up. To sufficiently explore this area, a deeper view of both siblings would be needed to investigate this under-explored area (Barron-Hauwaert 2–3).

4.2.2 The process of language acquisition

The process of language acquisition is a very individual process that is influenced by many aspects (Baker 121; Barron-Hauwaert 91–102; Bouko 49, 105; Cunningham 87, 124; Li 33–34). Yet certain trends can be seen in this sample of bilingual families. In most cases, the children went through the phase of mixing languages, which, according to the parents, gradually disappeared. The situation in which language mixing is only temporary and generally vanishes is also supported by the literature (Baker 101–104; Bhatia and Ritchie 40; Cunningham 57–62). Although parents reported mixing of languages in most cases, only half of the bilingual individuals recalled this phenomenon and reported it as a problem. This means that for bilinguals this phase is just a natural part of language acquisition. In most cases, bilinguals reported problems with grammar and the feel of smaller vocabulary available in each language in comparison to other native speakers. This can be related to the fact that they most often did not master the skill of writing well in both languages. However, this was not mentioned by parents in most cases and was only perceived by their children. Another important aspect of early bilingualism is the switching of languages according to the environment, in which they found themselves. In this research, none of the parents reported problems with this aspect, which is also confirmed by the bilingual individuals. From this, it can be understood that for them acquiring and speaking two languages was not confusing and did not pose a major problem in any of the cases. This fact is also supported in the studies presented in the literature (Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams 1–2). A related question asked by many linguists is whether bilingual children translate one language into another (Flocchia 4). Investigating this aspect would require a more in-depth study. Nevertheless, from the perspectives of bilingual individuals, the concept of translating languages between each other in their heads was mostly refuted.

As already mentioned, it is not only parents who influence children's language development. In all cases, the parents were supportive of the children's acquisition of both languages, especially by speaking to the children themselves. But bilingual individuals also reported other ways in which they were helpful. The following figure summarizes how useful each influence was in language acquisition across all bilingual individuals. On the same level with the family, in most cases, conversation with native speakers was most helpful, often complemented by the help of friends. On the other hand, although the internet is a part of many areas of life, except in one case, it was not helpful for bilinguals in language acquisition at all (see figure 20).

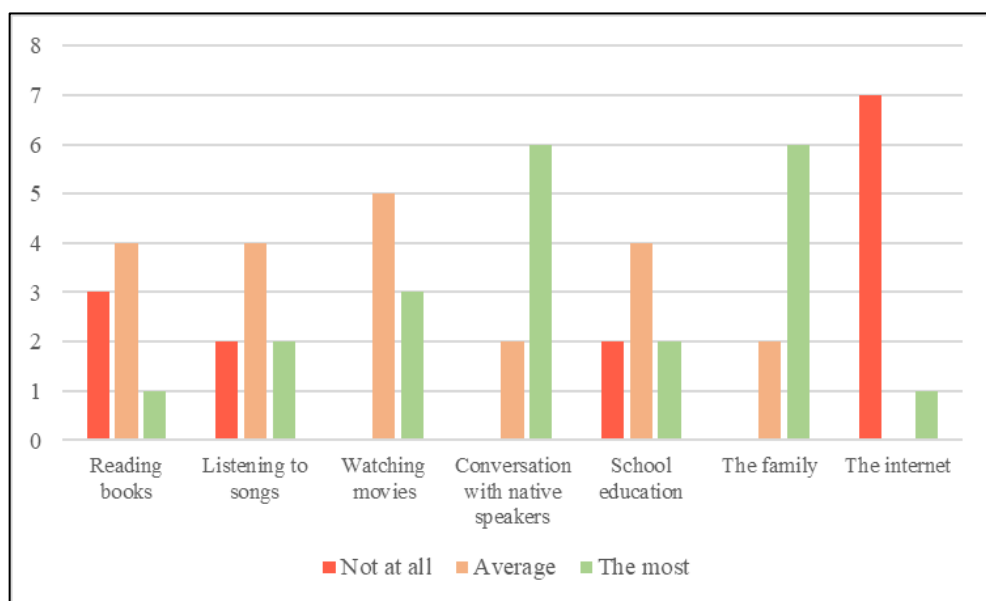


Figure 20: The influences on language acquisition

Whether these individual influences and their degrees have any impact can be identified by comparing them with the following figure. It shows a summary of the acquisition of each skill by bilingual individuals (see figure 21).

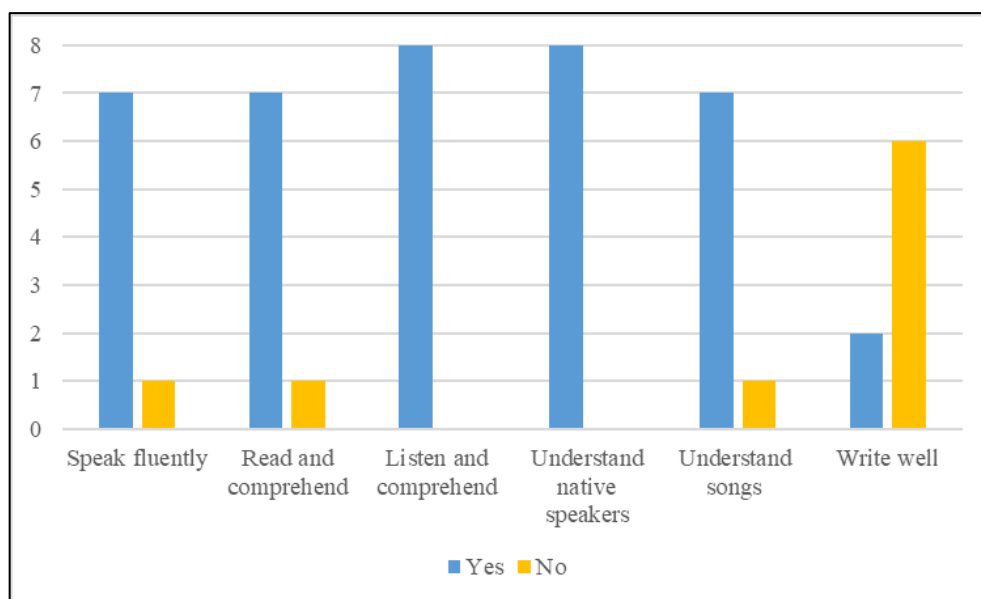


Figure 21: Language skills of all bilinguals

Comparing the two figures it can be found that each of the bilingual individuals mastered the skills of listening and comprehension and understanding native speakers. This result may have been positively affected by the components that most influenced the language acquisition process, which besides the family include a conversation with native speakers and watching movies. On the other hand, the majority did not adopt the ability to write well, which may again be linked to the fact that for a sizable proportion of the bilingual individuals there was a lack of influence on reading books that could have better developed this skill. These findings may inspire parents raising their children to be bilingual by focusing on various techniques assisting language acquisition, such as reading books, to support the development of all skills.

The way how their children handle school education is an important question for every parent. In all cases of this study, formal education was not negatively affected by bilingualism. Most bilingual individuals reported a positive effect, as they found it easier to learn and the remaining respondents reported no effect which coincides with the opinions presented in the literature (Bouko 20; Cunningham 65–66). Moreover, in most cases, learning other foreign languages was also seen as easier. This finding shows that although bilingual individuals perceived a more limited vocabulary compared to other monolingual children, bilingualism was not a disadvantage in their education and, on the contrary, was often perceived as a beneficial skill.

4.2.3 **The state of bilingualism and the language use**

After examining the language acquisition process, it is interesting to explore the current state of the bilingualism of the participants in this research. All the parents indicated that their children's bilingualism can be classified as dominant. Since all bilinguals reported differences in the level of proficiency in their acquired languages, with one of them usually being superior, the dominance of the languages is confirmed by them too. Although most of them are fluent in both languages, they still report differences such as accent in one of the languages, lack of knowledge of some of the language skills, or less frequent use of one of the languages. Overall, after examining and comparing all the responses of the respondents, it can be concluded that the more dominant language was always the one that was identical to the majority language of the country. These bilingual individuals were also formally educated in this language, which, along with other factors, may have led to this uneven language proficiency.

Apart from language inputs, the use of languages is a key factor in the development of languages (Harding-Esch and Riley 62–63). The bilingualism of all respondents was classified as active, using both languages, although not in the same amount and frequency. After examining individual families, a difference can be observed between the language used by the family as a whole and the language used in everyday communication by bilingual individuals. In all cases, individuals chose only one language identical to the majority language of the country, with one exception when both were chosen. This preferred use of one language in everyday communication again indicates its dominance.

4.2.4 **Observations, advantages, and disadvantages**

The last area examined was based more on the respondents' reflections, attitudes, and experiences of living with bilingualism. In most cases, parents believed that they had been successful in raising a bilingual individual and would not make any major changes. However, this can be confronted with the opinion of bilingual individuals. All of them plan to raise their children bilingually, which may have been influenced by their parents' successful bilingual upbringing. Nevertheless, not in every case, the individuals would choose the same method of raising a bilingual child and they highlight aspects that were lacking in their upbringing, especially concerning the speaking of the

languages. This indicates a positive view of bilingual upbringing, which they could implement with more understanding thanks to their own experience from the perspective of a bilingual child.

Finally, bilingualism is examined as a phenomenon that can bring both advantages and disadvantages. However, from the perspectives of both parents and bilingual individuals, no disadvantages were noted, only once at the beginning of bilingualism, which later disappeared. All respondents mentioned only the benefits that bilingualism brings. The benefits of bilingualism motivated parents in some cases to guide their children toward bilingualism. These include increased communicative ability, better cognitive skills, and overall broader opportunities in life. In comparison, bilingual individuals mention bilingualism as a possibility to communicate with more people in many countries, and bilingualism as a tool to ease the learning of other languages and increase opportunities in life. It is the right attitude of parents and the successful upbringing of their children that is the source of these positive views on bilingualism.

4.3 Discussion

The analysis has provided an insight into the phenomenon of growing up bilingual in a family context. Acquiring two languages simultaneously while growing up is a phenomenon that is becoming a reality for many families today. The element of families examined in this study highlights the fact that achieving proficiency in both languages is a complex process influenced by many factors. Several main points stand out from the overall analysis that have been explored so far from a linguistic perspective. However, the analysis findings are strongly linked to the socio-cultural aspect, which is associated with bilingualism.

Firstly, the family environment has the greatest influence on the child at the beginning. The choice of method and strategy for how to lead the child to bilingualism is essential and can form the development of the acquisition of both languages. Therefore, the knowledge of the family context was a necessity in the research. However, for families living in a foreign country, maintaining the culture of their home country is often important. Thus, parents do not only provide their children with knowledge of languages, but also with a cultural heritage of the ethnic group. Languages are intertwined with culture as well as bilingualism is associated with the concept of biculturalism, which is seen as an advantage by many linguists as well as bilingual individuals in this research (Chen and Padilla 2, 7; Martin and Volkmar 58–59; King and Fogle 1; Ramírez-Esparza and García-Sierra 36–37).

Secondly, it can be seen from the findings that bilinguals perceive the influence of factors other than family, which often have a profound influence on their language acquisition. Thus, it is important to also consider the social and cultural context, which is significant in the study of bilingualism (Martin and Volkmar 279). Integrating into society and feeling part of it can be a challenging task for a bilingual child. Therefore, the development of a social self is an important aspect. Friends, school, and community serve this purpose. As the child grows older, the influence of the family decreases and the individual is influenced by other social factors (Martin and Volkmar 271–273, 283–284). In this study, all bilingual individuals classified their bilingualism as dominant with the dominance of the language identical to the majority language of the country. This dominance may be caused precisely by the influence of social and cultural aspects when children mainly socialize with friends who speak the majority language of the

country and are formally educated in the same language leading to its more frequent use.

Thirdly, bilingualism is seen by all respondents as an advantage that brings many benefits not only in the linguistic but especially in the socio-cultural field. According to both parents and children, the benefits include, primarily, better communication skills, which are associated with increased social competence, as bilingual individuals often find it easier to establish relationships with people across cultures and are more flexible. This is connected to the better cross-cultural understanding that knowledge of two languages and cultures brings. Moreover, in today's diverse world, bilingualism is also an advantage in travelling and work areas (Chen and Padilla 2, 7). The bilingual individuals in this research often mentioned benefits in these areas that are relevant to their everyday lives. All these positives related to linguistic as well as social and cultural aspects could serve to inspire these bilingual individuals to lead their children to a bilingual life, which all of them plan to do. In this context, their experience of growing up bilingually can be an advantage in this area of life as well.

To sum up, bilingualism is strongly linked to the society and culture in which the individual families raising bilingual children find themselves. Both can have a positive and negative impact on the process of acquisition of two languages and the overall level of bilingualism. Examining bilingualism from perspectives other than the linguistic side points to the interconnection of this phenomenon with the realities that bilingual individuals must face, which can be much more serious, including the impact on their psyche and the search for their own identity. It is therefore important to take these aspects into account in bilingual parenting, as they can be very influential.

5 Conclusion

The study of bilingual families experiencing early bilingualism in their children is found as an interesting phenomenon in today's world. This thesis dealt with the phenomenon of growing up bilingually. The main aim of this research was to gain an insight into families experiencing early bilingualism. The goals of the research were to identify the strategies used in the language acquisition process and to compare their effectiveness and success from the perspective of both parents and bilingual children. Furthermore, the research explored what other factors influence bilingual growing up and how individual families evaluate the experience with this phenomenon. The study consisted of a theoretical review of the available literature examining bilingualism in children and subsequent research exploring and comparing the perspectives of bilingual children and their parents.

This thesis provided an insight into the lives of eight families in which parents guide their children to acquire two languages simultaneously. Although some differences can be seen between the parents' and the children's perspectives on the experience of bilingualism, the overall experience with early bilingualism from both perspectives is viewed as positive. In all cases, the strategies used for leading children to bilingualism were chosen very naturally according to the situation of the parents regarding their language abilities and the context of the country in which they lived. From the perspective of the children, i.e., the bilingual individuals, the chosen strategies were viewed as natural and achieved success, the parents believe it too. A notable finding was that bilingual individuals have acquired the necessary fundamental language skills and can communicate in both languages. The only feature that the majority lacked was the ability to write well, which may have been caused by the influence of language acquisition techniques. Altogether, the outcome of the bilingual upbringing in the families of this research can be considered a major achievement.

A further significant finding concerns language dominance. For all bilingual individuals in this research, the dominance of a language identical to the majority language of the country in which they live is characteristic. This fact may be a result of the impact of language inputs as well as the increased use of one of the languages, which is related not only to the family environment but also to other contexts such as society and culture that influence this and other aspects of growing up bilingually.

Furthermore, bilingualism for all bilingual individuals in this research combines not only the knowledge of two languages but also the broadening of social and cultural competencies. For example, it positively influences the formation of social relationships, expands job opportunities, and eases travelling. Each of these individuals feels a part of the society in which they live. They consider the acquisition of two languages from early childhood as an advantage in many ways, which is supported by the fact that all of them plan to raise their children bilingually. Overall, for both parents and bilingual individuals, bilingualism is not only an advantage but a part of their lives and themselves.

The limitations of this study consist of a small sample size. Although it does not allow any generalization of the results, which can't be applied to other bilingual families, it provides useful insights into the reality of specific bilingual families. Additionally, to explore such a complex subject, a more detailed and in-depth study would be needed to better understand early bilingualism in families and what it is like to grow up bilingually.

Moreover, this bachelor thesis can serve as inspiration for future research. With the help of the literature review and the research conducted, it has proven to be a complex subject strongly connected to the aspect of society and culture. The suggestions for further study include examining the social factors and family context to a greater extent in the study of early bilingualism. For example, a study of the external factors affecting the language development of the bilingual child and the socio-cultural aspects of bilingualism that the child encounters. Considering the interest of most respondents in reading this thesis, it could serve as a source of information for parents considering bilingual raising of their children and provide insight into the reality of bilingual families, both from a theoretical and practical perspective.

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

Hello,

I am a student of the Faculty of Arts at the University of South Bohemia, and I am writing my bachelor thesis on the topic of growing up bilingually. To assist me in this, I am undertaking a short survey of parents and their children who may live in a bilingual home, and also from individuals who consider their upbringing as bilingual. The questionnaire will take you around 30 minutes to complete. It focuses on your experiences and opinions of bilingualism. Most of the questions are open-ended, with some questions in the format of multiple choice. If necessary, you will also find additional explanations next to the questions. There are no wrong answers since my point is to find the reality behind growing up as a bilingual person from the perspective of both individuals and parents. Your responses will form part of the analysis in my bachelor thesis. All personal details will be anonymised. Thank you for your participation.

1. Please identify the category on which you are completing the questionnaire:

(if both boxes are applicable to you, please complete the questionnaire twice, once as a parent and secondly as a bilingual person) *

- I am a parent of a bilingual child or children
- I am a bilingual person (I grew up as a bilingual child)

Questionnaire for parents

2. What is your mother language? *

Mother language is the language you spoke from your earliest childhood. For most people, this is just one language but children in multilingual families may learn two simultaneously.

- English
- German

- Czech
- Polish
- Other

3. Names of your child(ren) and their age(s): *

4. In what country did you raise your children? *

- Czech Republic
- Germany
- Switzerland
- Other

5. What was the majority language of the country in which you raised your children? *

Majority language is a language spoken by most of the population of a country or region. It is often also the official language of the country.

Minority language is a language used by a community of people that is smaller in number and weaker in status than the rest of society.

- Czech
- German
- English
- Other

6. Which languages do(es) your child(ren) use? *

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish
- French
- Italian
- Other

7. Which language(s) is (are) your child(ren) bilingual in? Choose two answers. *

Bilingualism is an individual's ability to use two languages at the level of a native speaker.

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish
- Other

8. What language(s) is the mother of the bilingual(s) able to speak? *

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish
- French
- Italian
- Other

9. What language(s) is the father of the bilingual(s) able to speak? *

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish
- French
- Italian
- Other

10. Which language(s) does the mother of the bilingual(s) speak to the child, and please indicate the percentage of usage? *

11. Which language(s) does the father of the bilingual(s) speak to the child, and please indicate the percentage of usage? *

12. What language(s) do other family members speak to the child? *

13. If you have more than one child, what languages do the siblings speak to each other?

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish
- French
- Italian
- Other

14. What language(s) does your child experience in the community? *

- Czech
- German
- English
- Other

15. Did you make a decision to encourage your child to become bilingual? *

- Yes
- No

16. What was the reason for your child(ren)'s bilingualism? *

- Living in a country with a foreign language
- Different mother tongue of the parents
- Different mother tongue of other family members
- The benefits that bilingualism could bring
- Other

17. If not from birth, from what age did you encourage your child(ren) to become bilingual? *

18. There are several methods in the field of educating a bilingual child. Which method(s) did you use? Read the descriptions of each method and tick your answer below. *

One Person – One Language: This means that both mother and father should speak only one language to the child, preferably, of course, their mother tongue.

Minority Language At Home: Parents choose to speak the minority language at home, while the majority language is spoken in the child's community outside the family (school, supermarket, playground, etc.).

Time and Place: It means that parents choose a time and place to speak each language. For example, at home during the week versus at home on the weekends and vacation.

Two Parents – Two Languages: Parents use both languages and interact with their children in both languages. The choice of language depends on many different factors - where I am at the moment, who else is involved in the discussion, and more. Both languages are used roughly equally.

Utilizing Outside Resources: This method is used when neither parent speaks the second language. In this case, children can learn the second language in resources like language school, from native

Going with the Flow: This means having no special plan or structure.

- One Person - One Language
- Minority Language At Home
- Time and Place
- Two Parents - Two Languages
- Utilizing Outside Resources
- Going with the Flow
- Other

19. Most bilingual children go through a phase of mixing languages with each other. Did your child(ren) go through this phase? *

The mixing of languages (code mixing) is natural and usually will eventually stop. Initially, the child mixes the two languages, putting words from the second language into first-language sentences and vice versa, or even creating his own words by combining expressions that mean the same thing in both languages.

- Yes
- No

20. If your child went through the phase of mixing languages, at what age did it start and at what age did it finish? *

21. Did your child experience speech delay? *

A speech and language delay is when a child isn't developing speech and language at an expected rate.

- Yes
- No

22. Did your child experience any other speech problems? *

Speech problems could be: trouble making speech sounds correctly, hesitating or stuttering when talking, trouble understanding what others say or difficulty sharing their thoughts, difficulty making certain sounds correctly and other.

- Yes
- No

23. If yes, please describe the problems your child had. *

24. When did the problems occur? *

25. Did your child switch languages easily according to the environment, in which they found themselves? *

- Yes
- No

26. If no, when did the problems occur? *

27. How fluent is your child currently in the two languages? *

	Not fluent	Average	Good	Very good
Language 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28. Tick what corresponds to the type of bilingualism of your child: Read the descriptions and tick your answer below. *

Dominant bilingualism: Language proficiency is not balanced, one language is more dominant.

Balanced bilingualism: A speaker knows both languages at the same (similar) level.

Active bilingualism: Active bilingualism means that you can understand, speak and probably write both languages.

Passive bilingualism: Passive bilingualism means that you understand one of the languages but have a limited ability to speak it.

Simultaneous bilingualism: The child learns both languages at the same time.

Sequential bilingualism: The child first acquires language competence in one language and then in the other language.

- Dominant bilingualism
- Balanced bilingualism
- Active bilingualism
- Passive bilingualism
- Simultaneous bilingualism
- Sequential bilingualism

29. What benefits do you think bilingualism brings to your child(ren)? *

30. What possible disadvantages does bilingualism bring to your child(ren)? *

31. Do you think you have been successful in raising a bilingual child in terms of language acquisition? *

- Yes
- No

32. Is there anything you would do differently in bringing up a bilingual child in your home? *

33. What tips and advice would you give to other parents who are trying to raise a bilingual child? *

34. Do you have any interesting experiences or points about your life with bilingualism that you would like to share? *

35. Lastly, please tell me about yourself. This information will be held in the strictest confidence and no identifying information will be published. Please state your name, age, gender, nationality, highest level of education, and profession. *

Questionnaire for bilingual individuals
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36. What languages do you speak? *

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish
- French
- Italian
- Other

37. Which languages do you consider yourself bilingual in? Divide into L1 and L2.

*

Bilingualism is an individual's ability to use two languages at the level of a native speaker.

L1 is a speaker's first language. Often a synonym for mother tongue, or in contrast to a second language; the language first learned, best known, and/or most used.

L2 is a speaker's second language.

38. Which language(s) do you consider to be your native? Tick as many as appropriate. *

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish
- Other

39. Were you born into a bilingual family? *

- Yes
- No

40. If not in your family, where did you experience another language (L2)? *

41. If you were not exposed to L1 and L2 since birth, at what age did you become bilingual? *

42. What was the majority language spoken in the location where you were raised?

*

Majority language is a language spoken by most of the population of a country or region. It is often also the official language of the country.

Minority language is a language used by a community of people that is smaller in number and weaker in status than the rest of society.

- Czech
- German
- English
- Other

43. Where did you predominantly learn L2? *

L2 is a speaker's second language.

- Family
- Friends
- School
- Other

44. What was it like to learn 2 different languages at once for you as a child? *

45. Did your parents support your bilingual acquisition? *

- Yes
- No

46. How did your parents support your bilingual acquisition? Please describe your learning experience with them. *

47. Who else besides your parents has encouraged or helped you the most in learning two languages? For example, your grandparents, friends, a penfriend, your teacher(s) etc. Please describe your learning experience with them. *

48. What has helped you and to what extent in the acquisition of both languages? *

	Not at all	Average	The most
Reading books	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listening to songs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Watching movies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversation with native speakers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

49. Is there anything else besides the above that has helped you in the acquisition of both languages? *

50. Many bilingual families have certain rules about speaking in foreign languages at home (only minority language at home, weekdays L1 X weekends L2, mom L1 X dad L2 etc.) What rules do you remember from your home? *

51. Which language(s) did you and your family use in communication in society when you were growing up? *

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish
- French
- Italian
- Other

52. Which language do you use more in everyday communication? *

- English
- German
- Czech
- Polish

- Other

53. If you are not an only child, what language(s) do you speak with your siblings?

- English
- German
- Czech
- Polish
- Other

54. Are you fluent in both languages? *

Fluency is defined as being able to speak and write quickly or easily in a given language.

- Yes
- No

55. Do you feel that you know both languages at the same level? *

- Yes
- No
- Other

56. Explain, why you chose no: *

57. Do you actively use both languages? *

- Yes
- No

58. Do you have an accent in one language or do you speak both languages like any other native speaker? *

Accent is the way in which people in a particular area, country, or social group pronounce words.

- No accent
- Accent in L1 Accent in L2
- Accent in both languages

59. Are you able in both languages to ... (Tick only those descriptors that apply to your skills in both languages.) *

- Speak fluently
- Read and comprehend
- Listen and comprehend
- Write well
- Understand native speakers
- Understand songs, movies, videos, etc.

60. Which language are you more confident in? *

- English
- Czech
- German
- Polish

61. Were you educated in both languages at school? *

- Yes
- No

62. Which language(s) were you formally educated in? *

63. As a bilingual student, do you think that learning other foreign languages was easier for you compared to other monolingual children? *

64. How has bilingualism affected your school education? *

- Positively, bilingualism made it easier for me to learn.
- Negatively, bilingualism caused me problems in learning.
- I didn't notice any effect.

65. Have you experienced any language problems during your bilingual upbringing and education? *For example: mixing languages, poorer vocabulary, grammar problems, fear of speaking, etc.* *

- No problems at all
- Mixing languages
- Poorer vocabulary

- Grammar problems
- Fear of speaking
- Other

66. If appropriate, can you please explain in more detail the problems you experienced?

67. Did you experience any other language-related difficulties while growing up bilingually? *

68. Being bilingual, when you hear something in your second language, does your mind translate it to your first language? *

- Yes
- No
- Other

69. How do you feel when you are using both languages at the same time? *

70. Do you feel you have a smaller vocabulary available to you in each language in comparison to other native speakers? *

- Yes
- No
- Other

71. What do you do to make sure you do not forget either language? *

72. Are you considering raising your children bilingually? *

- Yes
- No
- Other

73. What advice would you give to parents who are thinking of bringing up their children bilingually? *

74. How do you think your language skills have benefited you so far and what will they do for you in the future? *

75. Growing up in a bilingual household, what are some experiences you ended up cherishing later on in life? *

76. What are the benefits of bilingualism for you in general? *

77. Has bilingualism disadvantaged you in any way? *

78. What is your motivation to keep using both languages? *

79. How do you plan to continue with bilingualism? *For example: deepening your knowledge, using your bilingualism in new ways, finding more native speakers for conversation, etc.* *

80. Do you have any interesting experiences or points about your life with bilingualism that you would like to share? *

81. Lastly, please tell me about yourself. This information will be held in the strictest confidence and no identifying information will be published. Please state your name, age, gender, nationality, highest level of education, and profession. *

This is the end of the questionnaire. By submitting the questionnaire, you agree to the analysis of the data you provide and give a consent for data processing. Thank you for your cooperation and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.