



TECHNICKÁ UNIVERZITA V LIBERCI  
Fakulta přírodovědně-humanitní  
a pedagogická ■

# Osvojování jazyka v bilingvním prostředí

## Bakalářská práce

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Studijní obory: 7507R036 – Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání  
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TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF LIBEREC  
Faculty of Science, Humanities  
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# Language Acquisition in a Bilingual Environment

## Bachelor thesis

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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Teoretická část se bude zabývat analýzou obecných pojmů spojených s bilingvismem. Cílem práce bude na základě pohledu různých autorů podat ucelený obraz o pojmu bilingvismus, jeho typech a pozitivních či negativních vlivech na jedince.

Praktická část bude probíhat formou interview kvalitativního charakteru s 5 dospělými jedinci.

Cílem výzkumu bude zjistit, jaké gramatické fenomény dělaly bilingvním jedincům v raném věku největší problémy, zdali jsou v současné době schopni "přepínat" jazyky automaticky, a jaký jazyk považují za gramaticky či jinak jednodušší a z jakého důvodu.

Metody: Studium a komparace primární a sekundární literatury, strukturovaná interview.

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**1. Dörnyei, Zoltán, 2009, The psychology of second language acquisition, Oxford: Oxford University Press**

**2. Pienemann, Manfred, 1999, Language processing and second language development, Philadelphia: Benjamins**

**3. Chaika, Elaine, 2008, Language, 4th ed., Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning**

**4. Harding-Esch, Edith, 2008, Bilingvní rodina, Praha: Portál**

**5. Miller, Nick, 2014, Bilingualism and language disability, New York: Psychology Pres**

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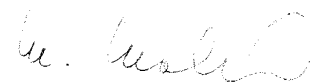
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*Děkuji tímto vedoucí bakalářské práce PhDr. Marcele Malé, M.A., Ph.D. za vřelý přístup, cenné rady a připomínky, které mi v průběhu zpracování poskytovala. Dále bych chtěla poděkovat všem zúčastněným výzkumu za ochotu a v neposlední řadě své rodině, která mě v průběhu studia plně podporovala.*

## **Anotace**

Bakalářská práce zkoumá problematiku jevu zvaný *Bilingvismus*. V teoretické části je nastíněna různorodost definic bilingvismu, dělení dle určitých kritérií, otázka pozitivního či negativního vlivu na jedince a také vývoj dvojjazyčného dítěte v různých podmínkách. Praktická část zkoumá pět dospělých, bilingvních jedinců, kterým byly kladeny otázky. Na základě jejich analýzy došla autorka k závěru, že bilingvismus měl pouze pozitivní vliv v jejich životě a že respondenti nevykazují závažné problémy s osvojováním si dvou jazykových kódů. Dále autorka zjistila, že tito lidé mají vždy jeden jazyk dominantní a nevykazují tudíž znaky vyvážené dvojjazyčnosti.

**Klíčová slova:** bilingvismus, osvojování jazyka, jazykové problémy, kognitivní vývoj, přepínání kódů, interlanguage

## **Abstract**

This bachelor thesis focuses on the problems of the term known as *Bilingualism*. The theoretical part concentrates on the diversity of definitions of Bilingualism, classification of the term according to various criteria, the question of the positive and negative impact of bilingualism on an individual and last but not least on the development of a bilingual child under different conditions. The practical part explores the answers of five bilingual adults who were asked questions. On the basis of their analysis the author came to a conclusion that Bilingualism had only a positive impact on these people and that they did not have serious problems when acquiring the two languages. The author also found out that the individuals had always a dominant and a weaker language and so nobody showed any signs of balanced bilingualism.

**Key words:** bilingualism, language acquisition, language issues, cognitive development, code-switching, interlanguage



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## 1. Introduction

Bilingualism is one of the possibilities how to raise a child. The meaning of the term can seem to be obvious to understand. People are likely to know what it means and who is considered to be bilingual. They explain it as follows: “A bilingual person is everyone who speaks two languages.” Unfortunately, things are often not as simple as they seem. The aim of the paper is to look at bilingualism from various possible perspectives to show the reader that bilingualism is far from being unambiguous. Other reasons why I examine Bilingualism are that I am highly interested in this topic, I know many people who chose the bilingual raising of their children and I also would like to learn new information and the hottest news of the bilingual area.

This paper focuses on the issues of *Bilingualism*, primarily on the contradictory definitions of the term and the controversial influence on a child. The whole work is divided into two parts, a theoretical and a practical section. The theoretical part concentrates on defining the basic terms when speaking about Bilingualism, the types of Bilingualism, the advantages and disadvantages of being bilingual and finally on the development of a bilingual child.

The practical part shows five interviews with five different individuals who are asked questions. The aim of the empirical part is to analyse the answers of the respondents and answer the research questions which are as follows: How does the individual perceive that he/she is bilingual? Which language does he/she use more often and in which situations? Did/Does he have any language problems when acquiring the two languages? Does he find bilingualism beneficial, neutral or negative in his life?

## **2. Theoretical Part**

### **2.1 Definitions of Bilingualism**

The term *Bilingualism* cannot be clearly defined. The authors who are mentioned below explain the term from different perspectives which results in the ambiguity of the concept of bilingualism. It can be hardly said which definition of bilingualism is right or wrong because the whole bilingual area is very controversial.

#### **2.1.1 The Oxford English Dictionary**

The most common definition which can be found in many sources and dictionaries is that “a bilingual person is a person who speaks two languages perfectly.” (Stevenson 2010, 67) The problem lies in the description what actually means to speak two languages *perfectly*. Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) mention an important fact which is that “no one speaks the whole of the language”. (22) People use the language for different purposes; therefore, they choose only the vocabulary which they need to communicate with other people. (23)

It is common that a bilingual person speaks the first language excellent at home and the second one at work but when he would switch between the languages and has to speak the first language at work, he might have difficulties in using the appropriate words while speaking. Harding-Esch and Riley use an example to explain their statement: “If she is a lawyer, for example, she may work only in English in her office or in court, but speak French at home, with the result that her legal English is far better (as such) than her domestic English.” (22)

### **2.1.2 Bloomfield**

“Bilingualism is native-like control of two languages.” (Bloomfield 1933, 56) In this case, Bloomfield takes into consideration the level of the two languages. He compares their usage by the individual and comes to the conclusion that one has to be able to use two languages on the level of a native speaker to be called bilingual. (57)

However, Baker (2011) considers Bloomfield’s definition too maximalist and responds as follows: “The definition is ambiguous (what is meant by control and who forms the native reference group?).” (7-8) Moreover, Morgensternová (2011) adds: “The balanced use of two or more languages is an uncommon, exceptional case”<sup>1</sup> (21); thus, it hardly ever happens that a person masters the same language skills in both languages. In sum, almost nobody could be counted as bilingual according to Bloomfield’s definition of bilingualism. (21-22)

### **2.1.3 Grosjean**

“We will call bilingual those people who use two or more languages or dialects regularly in everyday life.” (Grosjean 1982, 1) Grosjean focuses on the frequency and puts emphasis on the regularity of the usage of the two languages rather than on the competence in both languages. Similar definitions are given by the authors like Mackey who refers to “the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual” (Harding-Esch, Riley 2003, 34) and Weinreich who speaks of “the practise of alternatively using two languages”. (34) According to Harding-Esch and Riley “such definitions do beg a number of questions, such as what we mean by using a language.” (34)

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the author of the BA paper: „Vyvážené ovládní dvou či více jazyků je velmi ojedinělý, výjimečný případ.“

In sum, the key of defining a bilingual person according to those definitions lies in how often they use the two languages and not in what level they master. Unfortunately, the critical point of these kinds of definitions is, as Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) pointed out, that there is not clearly determined what actually means to use the two languages. For example, can be a man who speaks English both at work and at home and uses the other language only when talking to bus driver to buy a ticket or at coffee shop to get a hot drink counted as bilingual? The above cited authors' answer would be *yes*. In addition, this man would not need to use the right words or correct phrases and still would be taken as a bilingual person. (35)

#### **2.1.4 Macnamara**

“A bilingual is anyone who possesses a minimal competence in only one of the four language skills, listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing, in a language other than his mother tongue.” (Macnamara 1967, 59) Macnamara takes a different and quite open stand on bilingualism than the authors mentioned above. If anyone has at least basic knowledge of another language than his mother tongue, he or she would be, according to Macnamara, bilingual. (60) Baker (2011) mentions an appropriate example for this kind of definition of bilingualism: “Tourists with a few phrases and business people with a few greetings in a second language could be incipient bilinguals. Almost every adult in the world knows a few words in another language.” (8) Macnamara's attitude also indicates that bilingualism would be possible both for children and for adults to achieve, which differentiates his opinion on bilingualism from other authors who deny the possibility to become a bilingual person during life. (Morgensternová 2011, 21)

## **2.2 Types of Bilingualism**

Before we start classifying the term *Bilingualism*, there is a piece of information that has to be mentioned. Baker (2011) states: “Bilinguals and multilinguals can be analysed along the following over-lapping and interacting dimensions: ability, age, use, balance of two languages, development, culture, contexts, elective bilingualism.” (3-4) There are some aspects which have to be taken into consideration when distinguishing between single bilinguals.

### **2.2.1 According to the level of language skills**

Every single person shows language skills in four following categories. They are as follows: Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. Bilingual people do not have to be necessarily able to communicate in all of the language categories. Their abilities differ. Accordingly, we separate passive (listening, reading) and active (speaking, writing) language skills. People who speak one language and use the second one only passively, that is, they are able to understand other people but are not able to respond, belong to the receptive bilinguals. (Morgensternová 2011, 23)

On the contrary, the group of people who speak one language and are able to communicate actively in the second language too, that is, they can respond in an oral or written way, rank among the productive bilinguals. The reasons why an individual does not show his/her productive skills can vary. One of the reasons could be that the person does not want to speak the language because of personal reasons, another could be that he/she has moved to a foreign country and is not familiar with the new dialect or accent yet. However, it usually does not last a long time until the individual starts using the active language skills for social reasons. (23-24)

### **2.2.2 According to the means of language acquisition**

Morgensternová (2011) distinguishes between a natural (primary) and an artificial (secondary) bilingualism. She explains that it depends on where the person acquires the language skills. If it happens in a bilingual environment such as long-term residence abroad when the individual visits a local school or university or at home when parents use the language to communicate with the child, it is the natural (primary) bilingualism. On the contrary, regarding formal, systematic language teaching at schools, it is the artificial (secondary) bilingualism. (24-25)

### **2.2.3 According to the age of language acquisition**

When speaking about bilingualism, one of the central themes would also be *Bilingualism and Age*. Many authors have a different opinion on the topic but all of them agree that the age plays a central role in the language acquisition. Both Morgensternová and Baker divide bilingualism into two categories according to the age of the language acquisition; a simultaneous and consecutive or sequential bilingualism. Morgensternová (2011) defines the simultaneous bilingualism as the acquisition of two languages from birth or in early childhood and the consecutive bilingualism as the acquisition of the second language after gaining some language competences in the first language. (25-26)

Baker (2011) uses the same definition and furthermore adds the border between the two terms: “If a child learns a second language after about three years of age, the terms consecutive and sequential bilingualism tend to be used.” (3)

Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) as well as many other authors deal with the question whether the age influences the ability to learn another language: “It is generally believed that the individual’s ability to learn a language gradually diminishes with age.” (69) In sum, it can be said that younger people seem to be able to gain



native-like accents, while older people hardly ever lose their foreign accents. Psychologists call it *Critical Period Hypothesis* which says that “the ability to learn a language is limited to the years before puberty after which, most probably as a result of maturational processes in the brain, this ability disappears.” (Moskovsky 2001, 1)

#### **2.2.4 According to the balance between the two languages**

As previously stated, the equal use of two languages seldom occurs. Baker (2011) describes it in the following statement: “Rarely are bilinguals and multilinguals equal in their ability or use of their two or more languages.” (3) However, it sometimes happens and the unique case is called the *Balanced Bilingualism*. The reason why it is such an exceptional case to use both languages equally is that a bilingual person uses each language for various purposes, in various contexts and situations. Therefore, it is more likely that one of the two languages is used more often than the other. This case when a person uses one language more frequently is called the *Dominant Bilingualism*. Baker also mentions an important thought, which is, that the dominance between the two languages can change over time. It can be caused by the change of the environment or simply by the change of the personal attitude. (3-4)

#### **2.3 Bilingual influence on a child**

When considering a positive or negative influence of Bilingualism on a bilingual child, it has to be mentioned that these conclusions are conditioned by one essential criterion, which is the comparison with monolingual children. Therefore, the singular aspects will be counted as beneficial or not according to the results which have been observed among a group of monolingual and bilingual individuals under the same circumstances.

### **2.3.1 Negative impact**

The negative impact on a bilingual child was enforced in the early twentieth century up to the sixties. (Morgensternová 2011, 33) This was the important turning point in history when the perception of bilingualism changed and the negative effects of bilingualism were disproved. There are many reasons why the unfavourable effects cannot be taken seriously; however, one of the most problematic areas is that the studies which were conducted during the twentieth century were found methodically wrong. (34)

Firstly, the issue that devalues almost all the studies was to determine the definition who actually is bilingual and who does not belong to this group. Secondly, the studies were conducted in the United States of America and then the findings were generalized to other countries. Moreover, the research sample consists only of people of the certain age but the results were then universalized to the bilingual people as such. There were other issues such as family background, origin of questioned people or their education and job which contribute to the reconsideration and re-examination of the influence of bilingualism on an individual. (34-35)

In addition, Grosjean (1982) holds the view that bilingual people can in no case be compared to monolinguals. He demonstrates an example to support his statement: “A sprinter cannot be comparable to a runner or a long jumper.” (58) He wants to express that they are all sportsmen but each of them is good at a specific field. The same applies to the monolingual and bilingual people.

#### **2.3.1.1 Interference**

One of the negative effects, which bilingualism can have on a child, is the Interference. Weinreich (1953) defines the linguistic term *Interference* as “the effect of one language on another, producing instances of deviation from the norms of either

language.” (2) This negative transfer can occur on various levels of the language. According to Cunningham (2011), they are as follows: pronunciation, morphology, syntax, accent, vocabulary etc. A child who has been acquiring the two languages from birth is likely to use the grammatical rules or syntactic structures in the two languages the same way. The problem is that those grammatical rules and other phenomena do not have to necessarily function identically in both languages. (57-60)

For example, the English and Czech language differ from each other a lot. The English language belongs to the *analytic* languages while the Czech language is one of the *synthetic* languages. (Shopen 2007, 5-7) The analytic languages like English, Mandarin Chinese or Vietnamese are not inflectional which means that they do not consist of morphemes which express different grammatical categories like case, tense, voice, person etc. The verbs are not conjugated and nouns, adjectives and pronouns are not declined. Therefore, the word order is often fixed and the meaning is made by context so that the language can still be understandable and consistent. (7-8) On the other hand, the synthetic languages such as German, Russian or Czech work on the basis of the inflection. Every single verb has to be conjugated with regard to the appropriate and grammatically correct person, tense etc. and every single noun, adjective or pronoun has to be declined, which means we have to add a suffix or ending as needed. These types of languages do not necessarily have to follow the fixed word order as they are already clearly structured. (8-11) It follows that a child who speaks English and Czech might not conjugate or decline all the words in the Czech language which it says or writes or it might do it but only partly because of the influence of the English language.

Another example of the Interference can be the *False Friends*. Chamizo-Domínguez (2007) defines this term as “specific phenomenon of linguistic interference

consisting of two given words in two or more given natural languages that are graphically and/or phonetically the same or very alike; yet, their meanings may be totally or partially different.” (1) We can find some typical words which look alike in the Czech and English language but cannot be used in both of them to express the same meaning. For instance, the Czech word “*promoce*” is not interchangeable with the English word “*promotion*”. This English word is actually translated into Czech as “*povýšení*” or “*propagace*” while the Czech word “*promoce*” has to be translated into English as “*graduation ceremony*”. (3)

In sum, the Interference represents a typical negative influence which can two languages have on a child. However, the important thing to say is that it also plays an important role among monolingual people who learn another foreign language at school. Therefore, it does not have to be necessarily counted as negative effect of only bilingualism but of the acquisition of two or more languages in general. (Morgensternová 2011, 57)

### **2.3.1.2 Separate Underlying Proficiency Model**

*The Separate Underlying Proficiency Model* developed by Professor Cummins (1979) belongs to the most famous cognitive theories of bilingual education. It shows the conception which many people support and which speaks in favour of negative effects of bilingualism. Cummins describes the two languages as the two systems which are inside the head of a bilingual child. We can imagine a child who has two air-balls inside its head. When one of them is filled up with air, the other one becomes smaller a little bit because there would not be enough space for both of them. Since a monolingual child has according to this model only one air-ball inside its head, it can blow up the ball twice as much without any damages. (122-128) For a bilingual person this theory can be applied as follows: when a child improves his knowledge and

abilities in the first language, the level of the second one gets worse and vice versa. According to this model bilingualism would surely have a negative effect on a child. However, the findings of this theory were later disproved by other cognitive theories which contrary to this one say that the time which a child spends in one language does not negatively influence the progress which it makes in the second or another language. (Morgensternová 2011, 37)

### **2.3.2 Positive impact**

When speaking about the positive impact of bilingualism on a child, Bialystok is one of the authors who did a great deal of research which influenced the perception of the concept *Bilingualism*.

#### **2.3.2.1 Selective attention**

According to Morgensternová (2011), bilingual children are more likely to ignore the misleading information and focus only on the relevant structures. On the other hand, monolingual individuals tend to take into consideration all the circumstances when solving a problem and are not much able to concentrate only on one piece of information. When a bilingual and monolingual children were tested in tests of figure-ground perception which are tests where people are given black and white pictures and can see two objects according to whether they perceive more the background or the figure, bilinguals were more independent on the background. Therefore, Bialystok claims that the bilingual people are more selectively attentive and more successful when solving problems. (38)

#### **2.3.2.2 Metalinguistic consciousness**

Morgensternová (2011) refers to the Bialystok's studies which show that bilingual people understand the Saussure's model of the sign better. (38-39) Ferdinand de

Saussure divided a sign into two parts; a signified and signifier. The signifier represents a word, while the signified is a thing which refers to the word. For instance, the word *table* refers to the thing (the picture of a table). These two parts cannot exist without each other; each sign has its own sense; however, their connection is only accidental (it is conditioned by conventions) (Kacheria 2013, 2)

All in all, the bilingual people are considered to be able to separate the two parts of the sign and to think about the language more deeply. They can reflect the character and the function of the language. The reason why they are more successful at this, is the fact that they often have to switch the languages and choose the appropriate language for each situation. (Morgensternová 2011, 38-39)

### **2.3.2.3 Generalization**

One of the crucial advantages of bilingualism is that even a small bilingual child realizes that a single thing can have different expressions how to name things. Morgensternová (2011) states that this abstraction teaches a child from its childhood to keep an open mind and to act flexibly and spontaneously on any occasion. That is also one of the reasons why the bilinguals have better results at divergent creative thinking. (39)

### **2.3.2.4 Social sensitivity in communication**

Genesee, Tucker, Lambert (1975) have done research about the social sensitivity in communication. They took three groups of small children of different age. They were tested in an interpersonal verbal communication task. It was found out that the bilingual children, or as they were called in the research *immersion children*, “would be more sensitive to the communication needs of listeners”. (1011) They also emphasize the following information: “One could interpret these results from a role-taking point of view to mean that the immersion children may have been better able

than the control (monolingual) children to take the role of others experiencing communicational difficulties, to perceive their needs and, consequently, to respond appropriately to these needs” (1013)

## **2.4 Development of bilingual children**

As many authors like Bialystok, Cunningham etc. have proved, the stages of the development the bilingual children go through are different from the stages of development of monolingual children. Their development is more complex and takes more time. However, if the bilingual raising is successful, the bilingual children show better results in solving problems, learning another language and many other areas than the monolingual ones. (Morgensternová 2011, 35)

### **2.4.1 Language skills**

Every child has the ability to learn whatever language it wants. Children are born to learn more languages without much effort and difficulties than the adults. Moreover, if a child acquires these languages simultaneously (at the same time), it goes through similar stages to a monolingual child does when acquiring the mother tongue. Therefore, we can say that this bilingual child acquires the two languages as two mother tongues. (Morgensternová 2011, 41)

On the contrary, when a child acquires at first knowledge of the mother tongue and then starts getting in touch with the second language, the stages of development are different from the development of monolingual children. The children who acquire both languages from birth till the age of five years show different stages of the development and the means of the acquisition of the grammatical structures than the children who start acquiring the second language after this border. The reason is that

“at the age of four the cerebral structures get fully developed”<sup>2</sup> (41) and so children are not able to acquire the second language the same way. (42)

Another important developmental turn appears when a child reaches the age of seven. Children at this age acquire the syntactic structures differently than they did when they acquired earlier the mother tongue. Therefore, these children are not acquiring the second language but more learning a foreign language in their childhood. (42)

The importance of the role of age when acquiring more languages is indisputable. Singleton (1995) uses the term *the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)*. He mentions that the term can be used when speaking about both the first and the second language acquisitional processes. He says that “the first few years of life is the crucial time in which an individual can acquire a first language if presented with adequate stimuli. If language input does not occur until after this time, the individual will never achieve a full command of language – especially grammatical systems. (109) He adds that the border of CPH is around the age of six and that the most influenced area of language is the phonology. (124-125)

In sum, we can say that the younger a child is, the bigger chance it has to learn two and more languages with the right pronunciation, accent and intonation and so speak the languages like a native-speaker. However, it does not mean that an adult cannot learn the foreign language so that he can speak fluently. It just means that there are different techniques and methods how adults learn languages which differ from those that are used when children acquire them. (Morgensternová 2011, 42)

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by the author of the BA paper: „Ve věku čtyř let dochází k dozrání jistých cerebrálních struktur.“



Saunders (1982) states that “a bilingual child will pass through a three-stages developmental sequence”. (43) They are as follows:

1. **Stage** (from birth up to the age of two)

A bilingual child pronounces isolated words at first. At the age of two it uses two-words associations. It has only one lexical system in its head at this time which consists of the two languages. Generally stated, if a child produces one word, it is not able to translate it into the second language. It substitutes words which it does not know in one language with words from the second one.

2. **Stage** (from the age of two)

A bilingual child starts differentiating between the two languages. It develops the active vocabulary in both languages and is able to choose the appropriate language according to the person which it talks to. However, it can happen that a child still creates sentences containing elements from the other language. It can also name the same object twice (using both languages) in sequence. That would mean that the child realizes that there are two language systems as well as people who use different codes. A child does not show any knowledge of the grammatical rules yet.

3. **Stage** (the border is not determined)

A child is fully aware of the two languages. It distinguishes between the two codes in the area of the grammar and vocabulary. It switches between the languages according to the situation and the group of people who it talks to. The border between the second and third stage cannot be easily determined. It depends on the following factors: “the abilities of the child, the attitude of parents, the time spent in touch with each language.” (44-46)

### 2.4.2 Cognitive skills

A bilingual child is capable of more complex cognitive processes in its head. It has two active systems, which means that, in comparison to a monolingual child, a bilingual one has to switch between the languages according to the situation which occurs, choose the correct vocabulary, syntax, grammatical rules from the right language and use phonological aspects such as accent, intonation etc. which are related to the language. The important point is that a bilingual person does all these above mentioned things unconsciously and without much effort. (Morgensternová 2011, 47)

There are two main opinions on the language organisation in the bilingual brain. The first one is called the *Extended-System Hypothesis* which claims that the two languages are not stored in different locations in the brain. There is one language stock containing the elements of both languages. Grosjean (1982) states: “When a second language is learned, the new sounds (phonemes) are treated as allophones (variants of existing phonemes) and are supported by the neural mechanism that underlies all phonemes.” (266) The second attitude is known as the *Dual System Hypothesis* and claims that the two language systems are represented separately in the brain. However, they are both active even though a bilingual child uses only one of the codes. When a bilingual child starts using one language, the other one becomes active too. A bilingual child is capable of partial inhibition, which means that it can only partly deactivate the language which it does not use at the moment. (266-268)

The most interesting aspect of bilingualism is the *code-switching*. It is a well-known phenomenon defined by Grosjean (1982) as “the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation”. (145) It can be easily explained using the monolingual people as follows: the monolingual people use in their everyday life more varieties of the mother tongue. When a monolingual person speaks to his

employer, he uses different words and structures than when he talks to his friend or relative. Nearly the same applies to the bilingual people who also have to choose the appropriate code when communicating with their surroundings. Grosjean distinguishes between a bilingual talking to a monolingual person, and a bilingual talking to another bilingual person. (128-129) It has been discovered that in the first case, when a bilingual child or adult communicates with a monolingual person, bilingual people try to deactivate the language which they do not use at the moment as much as possible. Therefore, there is no *code-switching* during the conversation. The bilingual person chooses one language and he holds the conversation in this language till the very end. (Morgensternová 2011, 49)

On the contrary, the second situation, when a bilingual person talks to another bilingual person or to a group of bilingual people who speak the same languages, is much more complicated. There are some factors which influence the language choice of bilinguals such as “place, time, situation, the society status of the participants in the interaction and the function of the interaction.” (Grosjean 1982, 128) Moreover, a bilingual person decides which language he uses according to the proficiency in each language and prefers to use the stronger or dominant one. (129)

Grosjean (1982) describes two stages of the code-switching. He says that “in the first stage the bilingual decides which base language to use, and in the second stage he or she determines whether to code-switch.” (145)

He also states that the code-switching can involve single words, phrases or whole sentences. The important thing is that these words or phrases are not morphologically or phonologically integrated into the currently used language. They are used just as they exist in the original language. (146)

### **3. Practical Part**

#### **3.1 Research aims**

In the practical part I examined five bilingual adults who comply with the definition of Bilingualism according to Macknamara (1967) which is as follows: “A bilingual person is anyone who possesses a minimal competence in only one of the four language skills, listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing, in a language other than his mother tongue.” (59) These people use the English and Czech language naturally in their everyday life and almost all the participants have been acquiring these two languages from birth. I chose adults on purpose because they could consider pros and cons of bilingualism and think more deeply about phenomena which occurred during their childhood such as the presence of language problems when acquiring two languages, the ability of switching between the languages automatically, or the perception of being a bilingual person in general.

The main aim of the practical part is to analyse the opinions of bilingual people on their language acquisition and to find potential weaknesses which could occur when becoming a bilingual person.

#### **3.2 Research methodology**

The method I chose to analyse the bilingual individuals is the qualitative research defined as: “an approach that enables researchers to explore in detail social and organizational characteristics and individual behaviours and their meanings. To obtain this information, qualitative researchers depend on primary, face-to-face data collection through observations and in-depth interviews.” (Lapan 2012, 87)

As I wanted to meet the bilingual people and talk to them, I chose an interview as the research technique of the practical part. I hoped this option would enable me to

empathize with these people and to understand the problems of bilingualism more deeply.

### **3.3 Research questions**

I asked the bilingual people questions which should help me in the end to understand the issues of bilingualism more. By means of these questions I could decide if there can be some grammatical difficulties when acquiring two languages at the same time or if the brain is capable of dealing with this extraordinary phenomenon without much effort.

#### **Questions:**

- Where do you and your family live?
- What languages do your parents speak?
- What languages do you use when talking to each of them?
- Did/do you have any language problems when acquiring the two languages?
- Do you find Bilingualism beneficial, neutral or negative in your life?
- Will knowledge of the two languages influence any of your future plans?

### **3.4 Description of tested group**

Five people agreed to participate in the practical part of my bachelor paper. As I chose the qualitative research, I think that this number of participants can be enough to gather some necessary information and deduce some conclusions.

This group of people consists of three women and two men whose bilingualism lies in mastering the English and Czech language at least at the level A2/B1 in listening and speaking on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. These people can understand “the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure. They can exploit a wide range of simple language to deal with most situations. They can communicate in simple and

routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information.” (Council for Cultural Co-operation 2001, 23-24)

The participants are at least 18 years old and their average age is 22. I chose people of this age on purpose because I think that they are aware of their bilingualism; therefore, they can better reflect on their experience with both languages with which they get in touch regularly during their lives. They can also think critically about their skills in both languages and can better evaluate if they consider their bilingualism positive or negative and why they think so.

### **3.5 Before and during the research**

I contacted each participant and arranged a private meeting. The place was chosen according to my and participant's permanent residence. The language used when interviewing somebody depended completely on individuals. When I contacted each person to arrange a meeting, I asked which language he/she would like to use during the interview. I prepared the versions of questions in both the English and Czech language, and took them along in case the participant would change his/her mind. I must say that most people prefer to hold a conversation in the Czech language which surprises me and it also shows the balance between the two languages of each participant and how the environment in which they live influence which language they use more often.

The meeting consisted of two parts. In the first part I introduced myself and then the aim of my bachelor paper to the participant. I also told the person what the course of the interview would look like. I explained that I would ask him questions and he would answer me as spontaneously as possible. As I made notes during the entire interview, the bilingual person was told that his answers would be anonymous. I made

only short notes so that the conversation was not be interrupted. In case of doubts I explained to the participant exactly what the question meant.

At the end of the interview I expressed my thanks to the participant for attendance in my research and offered him that I would send him the results of my research.

### **3.6 Analysis of bilingual people**

#### **Participant 1:**

Martina (22 years old, Prague, Czech Republic)

father: Scottish, mother: Czech

The first woman lives in Prague with her Czech mother. As she is a good friend of mine and has an interesting life, I decided to contact her and include her in my research. Her mother is Czech who worked in Scotland and met her future husband there. After a few years they moved to the Czech Republic where their child was born.

Martina got in touch with both languages from birth and was acquiring them *simultaneously* which means that she got in touch with both languages at the same time (see chapter 2.2.3 According to the age of language acquisition). The mother speaks English well while the father knows only basic phrases from the Czech language. The mother communicates with the child in Czech and the father in English. They used the rule “one parent – one language” (Barron-Hauwaert 2011, 39), which is one of the methods when attempting to raise a bilingual child. As Martina grew up, the situation changed. Her father decided to work in the United States of America, so she has been living only with her mother ever since. The balance of the two languages, which she had been acquiring, changed too. She spoke Czech both with her mother and at school. Although her mother tried to practise with her the English language as well, the bilingual girl could not remember much from it after some time. However, every time

the father visited her for a longer time, she started remembering and communicating in the English language well again.

As for the language problems when acquiring two languages (negative influence of bilingualism), she mentions that her stronger language (dominant) is Czech because she uses it in everyday life. Therefore, she has rather limited vocabulary in English. When she talks to her father and does not know the appropriate word, she says it in Czech, describes the word some other way or her mother helps her. She mentioned another problem which she had when she was young. She could speak English fluently but when she learnt grammatical constructions and rules at school, she could hardly understand them. She said that it might be because her father had never taught her any rules. He let her acquire the language naturally and for the communicative purpose. It took her some time until she got used to the fact that she had to learn all the rules to understand the language better. Irrespective of the above mentioned problems she considers the bilingual aspect beneficial as it can help her to find a job in the future and learn another language easily.

Nowadays, she uses the Czech language more because she studies Art at the university in the Czech Republic but she plans to move to the United States of America after finishing study and stay some time with her father.

### **Participant 2:**

Marek (19 years old, Hradec Králové, Czech Republic)

father: English (Czech), mother: Czech

The second participant has a Czech mother who has only average knowledge of English and a father who is originally Czech but has lived in the United Kingdom for more than twenty years; therefore, speaks English like a native-speaker but uses also Czech to communicate with his wife and in his job. As the parents wanted their child



to become bilingual, they spoke both languages at home. Marek was acquiring the English and Czech language but as he became older, he realized that he could speak Czech not only with his mother but also with his father and he would understand him. Therefore, it was hard for the parents to communicate still both Czech and English at home. The father tried the method in which he did not respond when Marek asked him a question and said it in Czech. The parents also increased the usage of English at home (mother spoke English as well). This method appeared to be working.

Marek learned the English language also at school and did not have much difficulties with learning some new language constructions and using the language accurately. Moreover, when the third language (German) occurred, it was not as big problem for him as for other Czech children, who still learned how the English language actually works, to accept it. Morgensternová (2011) states that bilingual children who acquire two languages systems are then more likely to handle the third language without any problems. (46) As Marek told me, he could infer many things from English which he had already learned to the German language. However, he mentioned that knowledge of the Czech language sometimes influenced the learning of German negatively. (see chapter 2.3.1.1 Interference) For example, in Czech we say “Já ti rozumím” while in German we use a different case and say “Ich verstehe dich.”

Marek stated that he had difficulties with choosing the correct I/Y in Czech when he got older. He added that it could be due to the fact that his parents made him use only English at home and read in English for some time. Apart from this problem, he finds bilingualism in his life very helpful and is glad that his parents raised him as a bilingual person.

As for the future plans, he would like to work abroad. He knows that he definitely will use his knowledge of foreign languages. He would also think about raising a bilingual child if it was possible in the future.

### **Participant 3:**

Jitka (25 years old, Aberdeen, Scotland)

father: Czech, mother: Czech

I met Jitka in Scotland when I was working there in summer 2015 and as we became friends, I decided to contact her and interviewed her via skype. Both her parents are of Czech origin but stayed in Scotland and decided to work and have a child there. They spoke only Czech with their child at home. However, Jitka visited the local school, so she naturally acquired the English language too. As mentioned in the theoretical part of the bachelor thesis, this kind of Bilingualism is called *Natural (Primary) Bilingualism*. (see chapter 2.2.2 According to means of language acquisition)

Jitka gained new knowledge of the English language from the environment in which she lived. She obtained communicative skills from everyday situations which occur and learned grammar at school. She found friends there, which helped her to improve her communicative competences as well.

Jitka has no difficulties with switching between the languages according to the place where she is at the moment. Her parents behave same. They speak Czech at home and English everywhere else (in the city centre, at work etc.). The interesting thing for me was to hear about the situation when the whole family goes for dinner to the restaurant. I was told that all the family communicate only in English in order to fit in. This made me feel like there still would be some differences between the immigrants and the natives and the family are fully aware of that fact.

Jitka said that bilingualism enables her to communicate in Czech with the relatives, in English with the surroundings without difficulties and to travel wherever she wants because the English language is nowadays “lingua franca”, so she can make herself understood in almost all the countries in the world. She added that every new language opens a new door for the person to walk in. I must agree with the statement because it is true that mastering any language enables us to get to know a new culture, new environment and after all to understand the whole world better.

As for possible problems when acquiring the two languages, Jitka mentioned that she had and still has difficulties with the British and Scottish *accent*. As she said: “If you are not born as British, you will never become one”. She means that even if some people speak English well and naturally, the British accent is very specific and cannot be easily learned. It takes ages and it does not have to be a successful process. Another problem which is related to the above mentioned problem is the *pronunciation*. She told me that it had been hard for her to pronounce some words correctly at first but she had got used to it after some time and now has no problems with the speaking skill. What she found much harder than the pronunciation was the spelling. She admitted that she had always had problems with the writing of assigned stories or essays at school. Even now she sometimes has to check on the internet how some words are written when composing a longer text. It may be due to the fact that writing is a complex competence and requires many related skills such as reading, knowledge of grammatical rules etc. so that a person can write accurately. (Varghese 1990, 73)

In the future Jitka plans to stay in Scotland as she told me that although she speaks Czech with her family and relatives, she considers herself to be English because of the environment where she feels like at home.

#### **Participant 4:**

Michael (25 years old, Edinburgh, Scotland)

father: English, mother: Czech

I met Michael when I did some voluntary work at the summer festivals in Edinburgh two years ago. He explained to me in English what my job would be but I had no idea that he speaks Czech too. Therefore, I communicated with him only in English. After a few days he wanted to show me the whole town and introduce me to his friends so that I could fit in a little bit. When he gave a call to his friend, he started speaking Czech. I did not understand it at all at that moment. Later he explained to me that he had enjoyed speaking English with another Czech citizen (I realized that he had known that I was Czech all the time). I contacted him via skype and talked to him in English.

Michael was born in a mixed family. His mother is Czech who moved to Scotland for good many years ago. His father is of British origin but moved to Scotland because the rest of his family live there. As his father does not speak Czech at all, his parents talk to each other only in English both at home and everywhere else. For example, when they visit his father's family, all family speak English. Thus, dominant of this participant is the English language. When we became friends, I found out that he speaks Czech quite good but has a limited vocabulary and often uses the English accent and that sounds a little bit funny. He also admitted that he could not write in Czech at all.

Michael told me that he had never visited his family from the mother's side who live in the Czech Republic. He totally considers himself to be a Englishman. He mentioned that he has Czech friends with whom he tries to speak Czech but he admitted that bilingualism has for him no sense because he does not need the Czech language.

He can make himself understood everywhere in English. However, he added that bilingualism can have positive effects in connection with applying for a job, travelling around the world etc. but he thinks that communicative skills of Czech is not as important as for example German would be.

As for language problems (negative influence of bilingualism), Michael does not admit to have any language problems because he has been acquiring almost only the English language from his birth. When he was a baby, his mother talked to him in Czech because she did not speak as good English at that time. When she talked to her husband, she used the English language. That may be the reason why he had problems with speaking at first. He did not want to speak at all and when he said something, it was a mixture of Czech and English. The family worried and so decided to use only one language at home. His mother started speaking English to him too so that he would not be confused. The problem disappeared then but I must say that it does not always have to be a problem when the child uses the mixture of the two languages at first. The other way around, it happens quite often and after some time a child realizes by itself that there are two language systems which have their own constructions and rules which the child has to follow.

When Michael grew up, he found some Czech friends and learned basic knowledge of the Czech language too. However, it can be clearly seen that he does not want to use it so much and prefers the English language.

As for the future plans, he would like to make a journey to the Czech Republic to visit me and his family. He plans to stay in Scotland and find an English girlfriend there.

### **Participant 5:**

Lucie (19 years old, Turnov, Czech Republic)

father: Czech, mother: Czech

The last person is a young woman who lives with her parents in the Czech Republic. Her parents speak Czech but the rest of their family live in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and speak English.

Lucie was born in England when her parents were working there to earn money and buy a house in the Czech Republic. She acquired Czech from her parents and English from the grandparents and other relatives. After some time, she got used to switching between the languages automatically according to with whom she spoke. When she was about four years old, the parents decided to move to the Czech Republic because they always knew that the living in England was only temporary. Lucie started visiting a local Czech school. She adapted to the new environment fast and forgot English almost completely. She found Czech friends here too.

As for the language problems (negative influence of bilingualism), she did not remember any. She said that bilingualism is beneficial for her. She has never had any problems with learning new languages and when she uses English she can easily make herself understood. She told me that although she lives in the Czech Republic, she has never stopped thinking of herself as a half British.

In the future she plans to visit her family in England more often than only in the summer as she travels there every holiday to work at the restaurant as a waitress. She also mentioned that she would like to raise her child to become bilingual too because in her opinion these children have an easier life at school and in the world in general.

### **3.7 Results of research**

The data obtained from the interview were evaluated and each research question was commented and discussed separately.

#### **Question 1: “Where do you and your family live?”**

Three out of five people who I interviewed currently live in the Czech Republic and two participants in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I think that the environment where people live definitely affects the balance of the two languages which they speak. For instance, Martina lives in the Czech Republic, speaks Czech more often and so has more developed communicative and other skills in the Czech language. Michael, on the other way, lives in Scotland and so speaks primarily English. He uses Czech only when necessary; therefore, has not as good knowledge of the Czech as of the English language. Thus, apart from genetic aspect which influences the language skills of an individual, it can be stated that also the environment affects the acquisition and usage of the two languages. (Brain 2005, 103)

#### **Question 2: “What languages do your parents speak?”**

I chose people whose parents speak English and Czech. Three participants have parents where the father speaks English and the mother Czech. Two participants have both parents of Czech origin. However, at least one of them has acquired English for a longer time and so now speaks this language like a native-speaker, or their distant family live in the United Kingdom and the child can acquire two languages from birth.

#### **Question 3: “What languages do you use when talking to each of them?”**

All the participants have no difficulties with switching between the languages. As mentioned in the theoretical part, Grosjean (1982) defines the code-switching as: “alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation “. (145)

They all agreed that they switch between the languages according to the place where they currently are and according to the people who they talk to. Only Michael had problems with switching the two codes as he mixed the two languages and created new words which consist of the both of them when he was young. This phenomenon is actually called *Interlanguage*. In connection with Bilingualism Appel (1987) defines it as: “the version or variety of the target language which is part of the implicit linguistic knowledge or competence of the second-language learner”. (83) He continues: “He or she proceeds through a series of interlanguages on the way to complete mastery of the target language.” (84) This situation of the Interlanguage happens very often; therefore, the important thing for the parents is not to get scared of it and keep trying to raise their child this way.

**Question 4: “Did/do you have any language problems when acquiring the two languages?”**

As I experienced, there are many possible problems when a child acquires two languages. Four out of five participants had or still have language problems in connection with bilingualism. Some of the problems are not serious and it cannot be easily proved that they arise as a negative result of bilingualism. One of them can represent the *limited vocabulary*. When I was interviewing all the people, I asked them in the end if they could switch between the languages and I always noticed that they could not express themselves in both languages equally. Most of them started communicating the other language and at the same time used some words from the stronger one. I also realized that they always had problems only in the beginning and after a few minutes they used the other language accurately. It again depends on the environment and the language usage. Bilingual people use the two languages in different situations and for different purposes and so have only limited vocabulary in



each language. On the contrary, a monolingual child uses only one language in all situations during the day; therefore, it has more extensive vocabulary than a bilingual child when comparing the stronger language of a bilingual and the only language of a monolingual child.

Another problem which concerns only one person (Marek) is the *correct writing of I/Y* in Czech. It can occur because there are many grammatical rules in Czech dealing with the problems of I/Y writing. As Marek speaks English as his dominant language, it is hard to learn and keep in mind all the rules of the Czech language as well.

Jitka mentioned that the *spelling* and *pronunciation* appear to be a problem for her. It may be because these two phenomena are totally different in Czech and English. In Czech people pronounce everything exactly how they write it, while in English words are written and pronounced differently.

Almost all participants admitted that *writing* without errors in the weaker language is nearly impossible for them. I think that it is due to the fact that writing belongs to the complex productive skills which develops when a person achieves the certain level in the language. As these people use one of the two languages apparently much more often than the other one, they cannot reach the point and therefore are only capable of listening, reading and basic speaking skills. (Varghese 1990, 71-74)

Apart from these issues, another weakness when acquiring two languages can be the *stuttering*. Especially small children might visit a speech therapist because of the load of the two languages. The *crisis of identity* represents another issue of bilingualism. A bilingual child can have difficulties with finding its own identity and self-awareness. There are also some *cultural issues* when considering cons of bilingualism such as prejudices against bilingual people. For example, when a bilingual family move abroad, the natives do not have to accept them because they

speak the two languages and often switch between them, or the bilingual children can have problems at school to find some friends due to their bilingualism. (Morgensternová 2011, 45-48)

**Question 5: “Do you find Bilingualism beneficial, neutral or negative in your life?”**

All the participants agreed that bilingualism was beneficial in their lives. They mentioned many reasons to support the statement. One of the reasons why bilingualism is beneficial can be the fact that languages play an important role in today’s life and a person who speaks more languages has the bigger chance to find a good job. Another reason is that the more languages a person speaks the bigger chance he has that he always makes himself understood. Two participants also mentioned that people who have already known two languages have less difficulties with learning another one. I think that it can be true but there has to be considered that the genetic aspect and the age of an individual are important too. A person has to have talent for languages. Some people simply cannot learn foreign languages no matter how long they are trying to. Moreover, the child learns languages more easily than an adult. It is called the *Critical Period Hypothesis*. Birdsong (1999) defines it as: “a limited developmental period during which it is possible to acquire a language. Once this window of opportunity is passed, however, the ability to learn language declines.” (1)

**Question 6: “Will these languages influence any of your future plans?”**

I asked this question only to close the interview and to get an overview of each person. This question tells me about the participant quite much. It answers me my inner question how they actually perceive their bilingualism. All the participants answered differently. Two participants would like to move to the United States and the United Kingdom. One participant, on the other way, plans to visit the Czech Republic. Two

out of five persons would like to raise their child to become a bilingual person as they did.

In sum, bilingualism definitely has an impact on these people. They make their decisions with the aid of bilingualism and combine their dreams and hobbies with the fact that they can speak two languages. They simply benefit from the ability of speaking the two languages and do not see it as a disadvantage.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to gather information about *Bilingualism* and to analyse bilingual people as such. The analysis of people's responses provided information about bilingualism in connection with their perception of being bilingual person, with language problems and the positive or negative effects on a bilingual child.

The research showed that bilingual people choose which language they use according to the place where they are and people who they talk to. The environment also affects the balance between the two languages. All the participants speak primarily the language which is national in the country they live in. For example, those bilingual people who live in the United Kingdom prefer communicating English with the surroundings while those who live in the Czech Republic have Czech as a stronger language.

This paper also found out that bilingualism has a positive impact on these people as they can travel, get in touch with another culture and find a job easily because languages are in most cases one of the requirements when applying for a job. However, almost all the participants had or still have some language problems such as the limited vocabulary, problems with spelling and pronunciation and the correct writing of I/Y in Czech. Besides these issues, there are some other weaknesses like the stuttering, the crisis of identity and the discrimination of bilingual people.

There can be found some other researches of bilingualism. Drápelová (2012) did a research and came to the similar conclusion as I did. She noticed that the participants have problems with the writing of I/Y in Czech. In addition to that, she found out that there are some other phenomena such as the writing of S/Z and ě/JE in Czech which cause them problems too. (36) According to her research the respondents have difficulties with the Czech pronunciation and grammar while I noticed that the English

pronunciation and grammar is usually hard for them. (36) However, Drápelová included in her research people who are dyslectic and had to visited a speech therapist in their childhood whereas I excluded these. (36) Moreover, her research is focused on the bilingual people who speak two different languages such as Slovak, Czech, English, Vietnamese and Croatian. (27-35) My research consisted only of people who speak Czech and English. Therefore, I think that the results of Drápelová cannot be compared to mine as the group of tested bilingual people shows different characteristics. Although the results of the researches are hard comparable to mine, the research of Drápelová (2012, 36) and other researches related to this topic examined by Levy (2006, 62) or Pavlíková (2012, 56) agreed that the majority of bilingual people perceive their bilingualism as a positive element in their lives.

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## **Table of Appendices**

Interview

**Appendix 1:**

**INTERVIEW - English version**

**Information about the participant**

**name:**

**age:**

**country:**

**Questions:**

Where do you and your family live?
<i>Notes:</i>
What languages do your parents speak?
What languages do you use when talking to each of them?
Did/do you have any language problems when acquiring the two languages?
Do you find Bilingualism beneficial, neutral or negative in your life?
Will knowledge of the two languages influence any of your future plans?

## INTERVIEW – Czech version

### Informace o účastníkovi

**jméno:**

**věk:**

**země (místo pobytu):**

### Otázky:

Kde v současné době vy a Vaše rodina žijete?
<i>Poznámky:</i>
Jakými jazyky mluví Vaše rodiče?
Jaký jazyk používáte, když mluvíte s každým z nich?
Zaznamenali jste nějaké jazykové či jiné problémy, když jste si osvojoval dva jazyky současně?
Shledáváte bilingvismus pozitivním, neutrálním či negativním ve Vašem životě?
Ovlivní nějakým způsobem znalost dvou jazyků Vaše plány do budoucna?