## THE POSSIBILITIES OF ELECTIVE BILINGUALISM IN BFLA: RAISING BILINGUAL CHILDREN IN MONOLINGUAL CONTEXTS

## LAS POSIBILIDADES DEL BILINGÜISMO ELECTIVO EN APRENDIZAJE BILINGÜE: CRIAR NIÑOS BILINGÜES EN CONTEXTOS MONOLINGÜES

**Ovidio García Armayor**
*Ministerio de Defensa, Armada Española, Spain*
ovidiogar@gmail.com

*"Elective bilingualism", in broad terms, is defined as a characteristic of individuals who choose to learn a new language, but in more specific terms (when it is synonymous to "artificial bilingualism" and to "non-native bilingualism"), it refers to the linguistic choice of people who opt to speak what is a foreign language for them in a society where this language is not the community language. Combined with the OPOL (One Parent One Language) strategy, with both parents having the same mother language (L1) and at least one of them being proficient in a second language (L2), it offers families the possibility of rearing a bilingual child in monolingual contexts.*

*Given the inherent advantages to children's education and careers that could stem from elective bilingualism, it is worth dedicating a linguistic study to exploring its possibilities and limits in the field of Bilingual First Language Acquisition (BFLA).*

*This study sought to ascertain whether a certain degree of simultaneous childhood bilingualism can be achieved in monolingual societies, and its findings are encouraging.*

**Key words:** *Bilingualism, acquisition, children, non-native.*

*"Bilingüismo Electivo" en general se define como la característica de aquellos individuos que eligen aprender una lengua nueva, pero más específicamente (cuando es sinónimo de "bilingüismo artificial y de "bilingüismo no nativo) se refiere a la elección lingüística de las personas que optan por hablar una lengua que no es su lengua materna en una sociedad donde esta lengua no se emplea por la comunidad. En combinación con la estrategia OPOL (siglas en inglés de un padre, una lengua), con ambos padres hablando la misma lengua maternal (L1) y uno de ellos con un nivel adecuado en otra lengua (L2), ofrece a las familias la posibilidad de criar hijos bilingües en contextos monolingües.*

*Dadas las ventajas para la educación y el futuro profesional de nuestros hijos que pueden emanar del bilingüismo electivo, merece la pena dedicar un estudio lingüístico a explorar sus posibilidades y límites en el campo de Adquisición Bilingüe de la Primera Lengua (BFLA, en inglés).*

*Este estudio trataba de averiguar si se puede obtener un cierto grado de bilingüismo infantil en sociedades monolingües, y los resultados son esperanzadores.*

**Palabras clave:** *Bilingüismo, adquisición, hijos, no-nativo.*

## 1. Introduction

The following is a linguistic research project, based on the case study of the author's daughter, whom will be called H. It aims at determining to what extent it may be possible to achieve simultaneous bilingualism in non-bilingual social environments. This is the case of many countries in Europe, and, specifically, in most areas of the country where this case study has taken place, Spain. As a by-product, it is also intended to offer advice to parents on how best to achieve positive results when trying to rear a bilingual child in monolingual contexts.

When H's mother got pregnant, her parents started considering the possibility of raising their child bilingually, taking advantage of H's father proficiency in English. They decided that they would try and follow a bilingual upbringing of their daughter because of the inherent advantages that bilingualism meant for the professional and personal future of their daughter: higher educational and career opportunities, higher self-esteem, more open-mindedness, more opportunities to establish social networks, and a long list of etceteras derived from the current status of English as the world's Lingua Franca. H's parents opted for a One Parent One Language (OPOL, or 1P/1L) strategy.

This project is divided into the following epigraphs: first, one stating the objectives of this research project, then one explaining the methodology followed, then the theoretical framework will be exposed. The next and main part of this study will be the analysis and discussion of the case study in it, ending with conclusions and advice to other parents who opt for elective bilingualism.

## 2. Objectives

The question sought to be answered in this project is whether it is possible to achieve a certain degree of simultaneous childhood bilingualism or Bilingual First Language Acquisition (BFLA) in monolingual countries / societies. More specifically, this study focuses on English being used as L2[1], in countries where English is currently not an L1, through the use of "*elective bilingualism*" - this is known as "*artificial*", and as "*non-native*" bilingualism (Pearson 2008, p. 177). Its application in combination with the OPOL strategy will be scrutinized.

As opposed to a typical linguistic study focused on immigrant families, this project intends to focus on the OPOL strategy under the following conditions:

- The nuclear family lives in a monolingual society, with an L1 different from English (monolingual context).

- Both parents have been brought up monolingually.

- At least one of the child's parents is a proficient BES (Bilingual English Speaker - as defined in Jenkins, 2000, p. 9).

For this project, the following working hypothesis will be used:

In monolingual contexts, it is possible to achieve a high degree of simultaneous bilingualism (ability to fully understand any sentence about routines and everyday activities, expressing feelings, needs, etc., in two languages) in oral skills in children during early infancy, by using elective bilingualism and OPOL strategy, provided that at least one of the parents is proficient in the second language (L2), and that the amount of exposure to the L2 is, at least, of 20%[2].

This working hypothesis assumes that:

- The child will still be having a great part of their language input in the monolingual society's language, and hence it will be their majority language and it can be expected that it will be their dominant language too (the language they will be more comfortable with and that they will use predominantly in most situations).

- The OPOL strategy may be supported or reinforced with the additional help of media, tasks / games / songs in the minority language and / or activities with native speakers.

Results obtained from the analysis of the case study in this research are expected to provide a novel approach to the possibilities and limitations of elective bilingualism. To this end, the following research questions are intended to be answered:

- Main research question: Is the method of elective bilingualism combined with the OPOL strategy effective in achieving a fairly high degree of simultaneous bilingualism in children within monolingual contexts?

- Secondary Research questions: In terms of theory, what can this study provide Linguistics with, if anything? How can the analysis

of this case study help future developments in the field of elective bilingualism, combined with OPOL strategy, achieve childhood bilingualism in monolingual contexts? What could be the next step for anyone wishing to carry out follow-on research on this method?

## 3. Methodology

This project has been carried out using an instrumental single-case study - i.e., "a study of a phenomenon designed to provide insight into a wider issue while the actual case is of secondary interest" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 152) - to achieve a qualitative research through the descriptive-analytical-synthetic method. This method consists of describing the analysis made of a problem which is first divided into simpler parts (analytical method), and then the different solutions found are compiled into the solution for the overarching issue which is thus reconstructed (synthetic method).

This study is intended to offer an insight into the subject of infant elective bilingualism by using purposive sampling (the sample selected being the author's own three-year-old daughter, H) combined with analytic generalization. Using the author's own daughter as an informant for a research study has got an inherent advantage: a log can be kept of her linguistic development, and any passage which the author considers to be of interest can be recorded with his mobile phone, at any given moment of the time they spend together.

The use of a single-case study to achieve an insight into theoretical grounds should not be underestimated. Eisenhardt (1989) discusses the strengths and weaknesses/advantages and disadvantages of both single and multiple case studies. The selection of a specific case "focuses efforts on theoretically useful cases – i.e., those that replicate or extend theory by filling conceptual categories" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 533).

For this project, two main data collection methods have been used: diary notes, and audio and video recordings:

1.    Diary notes. The author has kept a log of H's progress in English and the interaction between the two semantic and morphosyntactic systems (English and Spanish) since the day she uttered her first

word in English, which happened to occur when she was 1 year and 3 months old (1:3), and he has continued to do so up until the moment of writing this project (3:5). These notes are based on the author's linguistic background and its analysis may hopefully be of linguistic interest for the purpose of future research in the field of bilingualism. His notes have not followed a periodic frequency; rather, he kept track of his daughter's progress or events that he considered of importance, such as her first word, her first sentence, etc. The first entries follow an approximate frequency of once a month, from 1:3 up until 1:8, and from that point on, 1:8 to 3:5, they follow a frequency of approximately once every two months. These notes are quite schematic, and, therefore, rather short. They typically have a length of a paragraph, sometimes slightly more.

The author's log mainly focuses on H's oral production - she cannot read or write yet, and any analysis of her oral reception skills is based on direct observation. These are the aspects on which the author has tried to focus, and which form the main features of the analysis of this case study:

• Lexical development (size of vocabulary repertoire) in both Spanish and English, especially in English (minority language).

• Morphosyntactic development of English: use of English structures and grammar rules, codemixing and codeswitching.

• Grammar transfer between English and Spanish.

• Synchronic variation. Use of linguistic traits from different dialectical varieties, both in English and Spanish, especially in Spanish - the language in which there has been greater variation.

The above mentioned features of oral production have been chosen because they are considered to cover, quite representatively, the linguistic development of a bilingual toddler, and the interaction between two language systems in BFLA. A special emphasis has been placed on following H's linguistic development of English because it is her minority language, and the one where she could have a lag during her bilingual development.

2.    Audio and video recordings. The author started to record the
      activities he undertook with his daughter to foster her acquisition of
      English in the context of her bilingual development at approximately
      the time when he started writing this research project. His own
      recordings have been complemented with those sent to him by his
      wife, which he considered to be of interest to his monitoring of H's
      linguistic development.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

Bilingualism and bilingual education are fields of relatively new interest.
With only a few exceptions - most notably, the works by Ronjat (1913) and
Leopold (1939) - the first studies on bilingual education began to appear in
the 1950s and 1960s, coinciding with a new interest in Linguistics and the
appearance of new disciplines in this field, such as Psycholinguistics and
Sociolinguistics, and also with new audio and video recording techniques
provided by new technologies.

       In recent years, there has been a growing concern over bilingual
education - and especially regarding ESL (English as a Second Language)
- in general, and in European countries where English is not the L1, in
particular. Two factors have contributed decisively to this interest: the
first is the phenomenon of globalization, and the second the rise of English
to the status of world's Lingua Franca, both events originating in the
second half of the 20th century, both ongoing, and neither of them likely to
become reversible in a near future. English is the language of tourism and
science as well. It is the language any two people with different language
backgrounds use for communicative purposes. This naturally translates
into an increasing interest in bilingual education in Europe (Crystal,
1997).

### 4.1. Bilingualism and elective bilingualism

Elective bilingualism in specific terms refers to the linguistic case of people
who "choose to speak what is a foreign language for him or her in a country
where this language is not the community language" (Pearson 2008, p.
177). Elective bilingualism is a tool available to parents to enable them to
raise a bilingual child in monolingual societies with only one community

language, provided at least one of the parents is proficient in a second language (L2).

Bilingualism is an elusive term. In Chacón's words:

> Both the notion of the bilingual speaker and the concept of bilingualism are rather fuzzy and have often been misconceived. The notion of the bilingual speaker has traditionally been idealized in the same way as other concepts that have not been adequately defined, in spite of being fundamental in applied theoretical linguistics (Chacón 2015, p. 107).

It is next to impossible to define exactly what bilingualism is. A definition of bilingualism based on the practical use of languages, and not so much on fluency or linguistic criteria, would be Grosjean's: "bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives" (cited in Baker 2011, p. 4).

When trying to define bilingualism, it is impossible to put a mark in the continuum in Figure 1 and say: "here, from this point on, a person is bilingual":



Figure 1. The monolingualism – bilingualism continuum.

Another important concept is that of balanced bilingualism, which refers to the state of a person who masters, or is fluent in, two languages on equal terms. This concept is a referential one, for bilinguals (or multilinguals) use their different languages in different social contexts and with different people, which means that they do not use all their languages in every situation. "Rarely are bilinguals equally fluent in all situations in both their languages" (Baker, 2014, p. 39). Typically, bilinguals tend to have a

favourite language in each of their socializing situations. When this language is the one used in most social, educational and / or professional situations, it will be the majority language.

## 4.2. Bilingual First Language Acquisition

How exactly early acquisition influences second language development is not clear. Late acquisition is usually more efficient, as grown-up children and adults can make use of their developed cognitive skills and metalinguistic awareness to learn a second language at a faster pace. However, babies and toddlers seem to learn languages almost effortlessly, provided enough input is available to them, and evidence shows that they may be "better language learners" than adults, despite their initial lack of metalinguistic awareness (Pearson, 2008, De Houwer, 2009, Baker, 2011).

Based on the age at which a second (or subsequent) language is learned, we can define different types of bilingualism: it can be achieved either from birth, which is usually referred to as simultaneous bilingualism, or BFLA, or by means of acquiring one language first, and then another, which is termed consecutive or sequential bilingualism. A very accurate definition of both of these concepts is found in Pearson 2008, p. 316. For the purpose of this project, De Houwer's definition of Child Bilingualism will be used: "Bilingual First Language Acquisition (BFLA) is the development of language in young children who hear two languages spoken to them from birth" (De Houwer, 2009, p. 2).

One other important aspect to take into account is the fact that every child (whether monolingual or multilingual) has a linguistic development of their own. There is a set of milestones which can be considered as the usual pattern, in the sense that most children roughly follow it (see below). These milestones should be considered with due care and allowing for some deviations from it, as a slight drag is perfectly normal, and should not be a reason for concern to parents or caregivers. Only when this drag is conspicuous (and bilingualism is never at the root of any linguistic disorder) should parents look for professional help.

In Baker we have a comprehensive while concise scheme of the above said milestones (Baker, 2014, pp. 49-50):

| 0-1 year | Babbling, cooing, laughing (dada, mama, gaga) |
|---|---|
| By age 1 | Understanding words and phrases |
| Around 1 year old | First understandable single words spoken |
| Around 2 years | Two-word combinations, moving slowly to three- and four-word combinations. Three element sentences (e.g. "Daddy come now"; "That my book"; "Teddy gone bye-byes") |
| 3 to 4 years | Simple but increasingly longer sentences. Grammar and sentence structuring starts to develop. Conversations show turn taking |
| 4 years onwards | Increasingly complex sentences, structure and ordered conversation. Use of pronouns and auxiliary verbs |
| 5 years onwards | Tell a short story that is meaningful |

Sociolinguistic conditions under which children are brought up determine, to a great extent, the point at which a child will effectively become bilingual. Input is arguably the most instrumental single factor when establishing the extent to which a child will grow up into a bilingual adult, but it is by no means the only one. Within the concept of input, one other important feature is exposure and, in BFLA, the rate of exposure to each of the languages. Pearson (2008, p.116) considers an 80/20 (majority / minority language) to be the minimum for bilingualism to prevail, and 70/30 a desirable figure.

Simultaneous bilingualism seems to imply a unique language development in which a child is learning two different systems of lexis and morphosyntax at the same time. These two systems may have more or less features in common, but all languages in the world share certain characteristics (for example, all languages have got nouns, to refer to objects in the world around us, and verbs, to express actions). It may be possible that when a child acquires two languages at the same time, they may be acquiring those common features in a synergetic fashion, enabling a symbiotic development of two languages that benefit from each other's growth.

## 4.3. Parental discourse strategies

A key concept, worth noting before the analysis of the case study, is that of parental discourse strategies. These are defined by De Houwer as follows: "Conversational patterns that express the speaker's wishes and expectations regarding language choice" (De Houwer, 2009, p. 134). In other words, parental discourse strategies are different possible approaches that parents can take in order to make their children use a determined language more or less. De Houwer classifies them in an increasing scale from most monolingual to most bilingual (De Houwer, 2009, pp. 134-135):

- Minimal Grasp Strategy. In response to a child utterance in Language Alpha, the parent uses Language A to ask the child to clarify the Alpha utterance. […]

- Expressed Guess Strategy. In response to a child utterance in Language Alpha, the parent uses a question in Language A to translate what they thought the child intended to say. […]

- Repetition. In response to a child utterance in Language Alpha, the parent repeats the child utterance in language A. […]

- Move On Strategy. When the child produces a mixed utterance or an utterance in Language Alpha, the parent […] continues talking in Language A. […]

- Language Switch. When the child produces a mixed utterance or an utterance in Language Alpha, the parent switches to Language Alpha or a mixed utterance and does not stick to Language A.

## 5. Data analysis and discussion

This is the case study of a toddler, H. She was born in August 2015. Before her birth, her mother started speaking and singing in Spanish to her, and her father did likewise in English. Her parents have always stuck to the rule of following the OPOL strategy.

H was born in the digital era. In these days, almost every person in Spain carries a smartphone in their pocket, and H's parents are no exception. What this means in terms of this study is that trying to raise their daughter bilingually through elective bilingualism is relatively easy. If a word does not come naturally to her father when speaking to H in English (an L2 for him), he just uses a synonym, turns around, grabs his smartphone, and looks up the right word in an on-line dictionary (https://www.wordreference.com/ being regularly used). Likewise, if he is not sure of how a certain word may be pronounced, he just has to look it up on any of the websites that produce audio samples of every single word in English (https://howjsay.com/ being regularly used). When looking for slang or very specific words in very specific contexts, the author texts his British friend Jim using WhatsApp, and the latter will come up with the most appropriate word.

At the start this work, H. was 2:9. She has been reared in a monolingual context (brought up in three different locations within Spain: Madrid, Ferrol, and Gijon; although Ferrol is located in the part of Spain known as Galicia, where there is a co-official language (Galician) that shares institutional status with Spanish, the contact that H has had with this language is almost non-existent, and, for that reason, and none other, Galician has not been considered in this project). Spanish is clearly the majority language in H's community. She is the author's firstborn child and, at the time of carrying out this study, the only one.

H's mother is a monolingual Spanish speaker, with a mid-level proficiency in English and French, who has spoken Spanish to H for most of the time since before she was born. Occasionally, H's mother reads out a tale in English or reacts to H's English utterances in the same language. H's father is a bilingual English Speaker, with Spanish being his L1 and English his L2 (acquired after the age of 7). He has always spoken English, and English only to H starting before she was born. He always uses a Southern England's dialectical variety of English. In appendix 1 you can find a table that sums up the educational and linguistic backgrounds of H´s parents. These always use Spanish in their communications between them, both in front of their daughter and otherwise. Following De Houwer's guidance (De Houwer, 2009, p. 78), it is considered important to note that H's mother fully understands her child's conversations in English with her father.

H's extended family uses only Spanish when communicating with her. Apart from daily communication with her father, H's main contact with the English language is through television. Almost all of the TV shows and cartoons that she watches are deliberately set to English audio by her parents. Her two favourite TV shows use different dialectical varieties of English, with "Peppa Pig" using RP (Received Pronunciation) English and "The Mickey Mouse Club House" using GA (General American) English.

All of H's contact with English is chiefly, but not exclusively, oral in nature. H's parents are also teaching her the letters both in English and Spanish, and she recognizes "H" (being the first letter in her name) and a few others. H seems genuinely interested in learning how to read, and frequently asks her parents "what reads in here?" when she comes across a script that, naturally, she cannot read yet.

Turning now to exposure and context, this is a summary in figures:

- H has been exposed to two languages, English and Spanish, since before she was born. At the time this study was completed, she was 3:5. That constitutes the timespan for this longitudinal study.

- Due to his job, H's father spent some time away from home during those three years and five months. In those days that he was away, the only English input that H received came from TV shows (children cartoons), and also from her English teacher at her kindergarten. These days roughly summed 220 days in the total timespan, approximately 18 % of H´s life.

- The context of language exposure in both languages is clearly different in this 18% timespan, from the remaining 82%. In the former, English is limited to TV shows and cartoons, and occasionally to songs and games practised with her English teacher at her crèche. When her father was not with her, not only English input constituted a low amount of the total amount of language that H was exposed to when she was active (about 25% percent of her active hours) but, more significantly, this input was delivered in a passive context, in which the child did not interact, did not sing, and did not play, with the only aforementioned exception of her English teacher at the nursery (which is estimated in a low 5% of this time).

- When her father was at home, on the other hand, the exposure to English language of H increased, to approximately 50% of the total input in her active time (her interactions with him and her visioning of TV shows). Moreover, and possibly more importantly, the context in this second situation included both passive exposure and active interactions with her father (including reading books, playing games and singing songs), with passive activities being approximately 40% of the time, and interactive activities the remaining 60%.

Concerning parental discourse strategies, the author's impression has always been that there was a clear asymmetry in terms of the input that could be available to H in Spanish and English -with the scale clearly leaning on the side of the former. He has always expected H to speak Spanish and was hoping that she might speak some English when she communicated with him, but he was aware of the fact that Spanish would be her primary language. The discourse strategies chosen by him, therefore, are those that favour the minority language, English, and more specifically: Expressed Guess Strategy (in response to an utterance by H in Spanish, he uses a question in English to translate what he thought she intended to say), Repetition (in response to an utterance by H in Spanish, he repeats it in English), and Move On Strategy (when H produces a mixed utterance or an utterance in Spanish, he continues to talk in English).

H's father has also tried to reinforce the English pole of her bilingual upbringing by employing different assets thought to be related to cognitive and linguistic learning, chiefly but not exclusively related to music and images. These included:

- A lullaby in English. Up until H turned three years old, her father was the person "in charge of" taking her to bed, and he consistently did it by using one specific lullaby in English language ("The Connamara Cradle Song", of Irish origin).

- Lots of songs in English: mainly nursery rhymes, and songs for children.

- Flashcards. Activities related to images are well known as an effective tool in lexical development. Flashcards have mainly

been used. Good examples can be found on the British Council website: https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/flashcards

- Jigsaw puzzles and other games, always in English (her favourite jigsaw puzzle is a map of the world with the names of continents and oceans in English).

- Regularly connecting to British radio broadcasts on the internet. The author especially enjoys listening to "Heart Radio" because music helps and fosters cognitive and linguistic developments: https://www.heart.co.uk.

- All cartoons and TV shows, as well as films, have always been set to English audio (whenever this was the original language for the show) for H.

Following is an update on H's current status in her bilingual linguistic development.

## 5.1. Receptive skills

H has got a perfectly normal development in both languages, English, and Spanish, in terms of receptive skills. She can understand most sentences she is told in either language, provided basic, daily-use vocabulary is employed.

H can understand any TV show in English or Spanish. She happily watches cartoons in English (even complaining when Peppa Pig speaks Spanish) and, on the other hand, disapproves of cartoons in any language other than English or Spanish (for example, French) because she does not understand what is said in them.

## 5.2. Productive skills

As far as language production is concerned, H chiefly uses Spanish in her daily communications. This is not surprising at all, as the practical totality of her social networks speaks that language. When communicating with

her father, she sometimes uses Spanish, sometimes English. When she uses Spanish, her father tries to foster her using English by applying the parental discourse strategies already explained.

The other instance in which she uses English productively is when playing by herself. There is a good probability that this is highly related to her watching cartoons in English, since most of her toys are related to the TV shows and films she usually watches in English (mainly "Peppa Pig", "The Mickey Mouse Club House", and "Frozen").

The following is a transcript of H playing alone with her toys from "The Mickey Mouse Club Hose" merchandising:

> Date: 25th October 2018 (3:2).
> People: H.
>
> H.                 Dale[3]! Here it is.
>                    …
>                    Hello! How're you doin' there?
>                    [Unintelligible]
>                    It's much bigger.
>                    [Unintelligible] this. No, much better, much better. I'm trying this.
>                    [Unintelligible] ah, so much better. No, Chip, don't go away. You [unintelligible]ing. Ok?
>                    No, Dale, don't go away.
>                    [Unintelligible].
>                    Dale! Dale!
>                    [Guttural Noises]

## 5.3. Lexical development

H started to produce words in Spanish and English at approximately the same time, when she was 1:3. That is slightly behind the regular pattern for either a monolingual or a bilingual child, but perfectly normal in any sense. Her first three words in English were, in this order, "apple", "cheese", and "queen".

One month later, at 1:4, she was producing about 30 words in English and a slightly higher number in Spanish. These included: "Minnie" (Mouse), "Peppa" (Pig), "pee", "poo", "mommy", "tee" (tree), "I-joo" (Hey Jude, the famous song by The Beatles), "nappy", "Paw par" (Paw Patrol, a well-known cartoon show) and "bubbles". These are chiefly related to the TV shows she watched and the songs her father sang to her, as well as to routine activities. At that time, she started having problems with producing consonant clusters (tee, instead of tree), which is something we can find systematically in the language development of any human being. To this day, she still has problems with the pronunciation of consonant "R", both in Spanish (in its trill realization) and in English when in a consonant cluster. It is worth noting that at this time, remarkably early, she produced her first sentence in English: "Where are you?" That is approximately 6 to 9 months ahead of the regular pattern in any child, as reflected by Baker and stated above.

At 1:5, she started recognizing parts of her face, and named them when pointed at in her father's face by him: "mouth", "nose", ears", eyes", "cheeks". She also produced at that time her first interjections in English: "Oh, no!", "Oh, dear!", and learned vocabulary related to requests and routine activities, like "keys" and "hungry".

At 1:6, she started codemixing: "*Hola*, moon" (Hello, moon), "*Mira, un* car" (Look, a car). She has continued to codemix and codeswitch regularly since that moment.

At 1:8, she commenced producing creative combinations of two words: "Peppa, rubbish" (there are dust balls on my Peppa Pig dolly). This is remarkable, as it is considerably ahead of the regular linguistic development in children, whether bilingual or otherwise.

At 2:0, she produced the first word in English not taught to her by her father, "*mug* of coffee". She must have learnt this word from a TV show, which is a clear proof of the didactic value of cartoons set in English to children.

At 2:3, she started singing in English, and has never stopped doing it since then. This is a transcript of a footage taken at that time:

Date: 7ᵗʰ December 2017 (H is 2:3).
People: H (H) and her mother (M).

| H. | […] is coming to town. |
|----|------------------------|
| M. | *Otra vez* (Again). |
| H. | Santa Claus is coming |
| H&M. | to town. |

She also sings in Spanish, chiefly the songs she learns at school and through the online videos of the popular Spanish band "Cantajuegos". In general, she prefers songs in English, being her favourite the following: "Ba Ba Black Sheep", "Old McDonald Had a Farm", "London Bridge is Falling Down", "Do, Re, Mi" song from "The Sound of Music" OST, and the Christmas carol "12 Days of Christmas".

At 2:9 (as videotaped), she could say the names of most shapes in English. The following is a transcription of "the game of shapes", i.e. H playing flashcards with her father.

Date: 27ᵗʰ May 2018 (2:9).
People: H (H) and her father (F).

| F. | Baby, would you like to play "shapes"? |
|----|------------------------------------------|
| H. | *Sí* (Yes). |
| F. | Come on, let's play shapes. I've got it here. |
| H. | ¡*Hala*! (Wow!) |
| F. | Hey, it's shapes! |
|    | Ok, so you gotta say what shapes these are, ok? |
|    | Ok, first one. What shape is this? |
| H. | Heart. |
| F. | Heart. Well done! |
|    | This one. What shape is this? |
| H. | A diamond. |
| F. | A diamond. Very well, baby! |
|    | Ok. What shape is this? I don't think you know this one. |
| H. | No this one. |

| F. | You don't know this one. It's an oval. |
| H. | *uval. |
| F. | Oval. |
| H. | *uval. |
| F. | What shape is this? |
| H. | I *nini [don't know what] shape is this. |
| F. | Yeah, you should know it. |
| H. | No. |
| F. | It's a pentagon. |
| H. | Pentagon. |
| F. | What colour is this? |
| H. | Yellow. |
| F. | Well done! What shape is this? |
| H. | Circle. |
| F. | Circle, well done, well done. Ok. What shape is this? |
| H. | Triangle. |
| F. | Very well! Triangle. Yes, it is. What shape is this? |
| H. | Hmm… *hatigon |
| F. | Hexagon. |
| H. | Hexagon. |
| F. | Hexagon. |
| H. | Hexagon. |
| F. | Ok. What shape is this? |
| H. | Rectangle. |
| F. | It's a rectangle! Well done! What shape is this? |
| H. | Circle. |
| F. | It's a circle, yes. Well, it's supposed to be a sphere, because it's supposed to be in 3D. But yes, ok, circle is all right. What shape is this? |
| H. | Square. |
| F. | Very well! Square. What shape is this? |
| H. | [laughs] |
| F. | A cube. |
| H. | Cube. |

| F. | Cube. |
| | And finally, what shape is this? |
| H. | A star. |
| F. | A star, very well, baby! You got them all! |
| | Excellent! |
| [H claps her hands] | |
| F. | Bravo! |

It is worth noting, from the above transcription that, at the time, H already masters the use of English determiners, as proofs the fact that when told "a cube" she answers "cube", recognizing that "a" was not part of the name of the shape.

### 5.4. Morphosyntactic development. Codemixing and codeswitching

H has followed a parallel morphosyntactic development in both languages, English and Spanish, although her production in the latter is considerably more regular than that in the former. She has undoubtedly benefited from the synergetic development of both languages at the same time in symbiosis, and she has currently achieved a similar and considerably remarkable mastery of both languages' grammar use, to include:

- Basic sentences in both languages, including expressing feelings, short interjections, making requests and posing questions of curiosity (she has already started the "what is this?", and "why is this so?" phase).

- Recognition and good use of determiners, in both languages.

- Recognition and good use of pronouns all and above - with some occasional mistakes-, in both languages.

- Basic conversations including turn-taking in a logical, creative fashion, in both languages.

- Use of singular and plural, in both languages.

- Some verb inflections, mostly of regular verbs.

Achievements do not include, as of yet, gender (Spanish), irregular conjugations (she produces only a very short number of them) or descriptions in either language.

As part of a normal bilingual development, H codemixes (uses both English and Spanish in the same sentence) and codeswitches (changes from sentences in English to sentences in Spanish and vice versa) regularly and systematically, albeit less and less by the day. Both codeswitching and codemixing are natural outcomes in the process of BFLA, and both are widely encountered in the early linguistic development of bilingual children. Before the linguistic and scientific study of the phenomenon of bilingualism, codeswitching and codemixing were commonly thought to be the expression of mental disorder for which bilingualism was to be blamed (De Houwer, 2009, p. 38). Nowadays we know they are perfectly correct features that are part of the steps for most bilingual children on their progress to bilingualism. "Mixing languages is about being inventive within current resources and does not indicate a muddle" (Baker 2011, p. 96).

These are some examples of her codemixing:

(2:4)      —"Oh, oh, it's rain. I need a *paraguas* (umbrella)".[4]

            —"*Abuela, comí lentejas con* potatoes (grandma, I had lentil soup with potatoes)".

(2:6)      —"*¿Qué hiciste*\*? ¡*Caca*! Boo, disgusting! (what did you\*do (she meant I)? Poo! Boo, disgusting!").

(2:9)      —"Magic tricks! *A ver, ¿dónde está mi* wand? (let's see, where is my wand?"

Hilarious as it may sound, H's father has always been very careful not to appear scornful in any sense to his daughter when she produced these features. Codemixing and codeswitching are also supposed to wane and eventually fade away with time, as bilingual children grow up and start to be aware of the two perfectly distinct linguistic systems they use (i.e., they begin to develop metalinguistic awareness that enables them to distinguish between languages).

## 5.5. Grammar transfer

H regularly transfers grammar structures from English to Spanish and vice versa. This is perfectly normal a behaviour in bilingual children and it is supposed to eventually subside. The main grammar features observed to have taken part in this process of transfer are:

- Saxon Genitive. This typical English structure that expresses possession is formed by adding "apostrophe + s" at the end of a noun to denote that the following item(s) in the sentence belong(s) to that noun. H regularly transferred this construct into Spanish from 2y to 3y, even when word order in the Spanish sentence made words that would go after the noun in genitive, precede it: "*el abuelo's mando\**" – *el mando del abuelo* (grandpa's remote), or "*¿Vamos a casa de la abuela's\**?*" (Shall we go to grandma's?). H began making this transfer less and less by the day, as if acquiring awareness of its lack of grammatical sense, and she has stopped making it by now (3:5).

- Adjective order. Adjective order is different in English and in Spanish. In English, adjectives typically precede the noun they modify; in Spanish, it is usually the other way around (there are exceptions to these general rules, in both languages, especially in Spanish). H was sometimes noted as using Spanish adjective order in English ("a crayon green"), and occasionally using English adjective order in Spanish ("*una alta torre*" -a high tower). This transfer can also be considered part of her normal bilingual development, and it has already vanished.

- Verb "to be". The verb "to be" translates into Spanish into two different verbs, "*ser*" and "*estar*". This is also the case in other languages of Latin origin (such as Italian), but not in all of them (it is not the case of French). Explaining the difference in use between the two of them is one of the first and main handicaps a teacher of Spanish faces when teaching this language to students who take Spanish studies as an L2 and come from languages where there is just one verb that covers all the possible meanings of "*ser*" and "*estar*" (for example, English).

H has been noted as mistaking the verb "*ser*" for the verb "*estar*": "*Papá, ¿eres triste*?"(dad, are you sad?), and vice versa, a trait very commonly found in English-speaking students of Spanish as an L2, and rarely found in monolingual Spanish children. This seems to be an indicator of a normal development of the English language, and a logical transfer of this into Spanish, as part of a regular, bilingual development. She has stopped carrying out this transfer.

- Gender. The fact that English has got no inflections for gender may be exercising a modifying component on her lack of good use of gender inflections in Spanish. So far, she uses whatever choice of gender inflection she has learnt for a determined noun or adjective. This is usually the case of the feminine inflection, chiefly because that is the most extensively used by her mother when describing to H how she is or how she feels: "*Papá, ¿estás cansada*?" (dad, are you tired [feminine inflection]?)

- Reflexive verbs. Reflexives are those verbs in which the subject and the object are the same, and this is expressed by using an adverb. This property is far more frequent in Spanish (and other languages of Latin origin) than in English, although examples can be found in this language. Some verbs that are reflexive in Spanish are not reflexive in English, and vice versa. H regularly transfers this feature from one language to the other, when they do not have a correspondence: "*Papá, ¿afeitaste*?" (dad, have you shaved[5]).

## 5.6. Dialectical varieties (accents)

In her relatively short language development, H's exposure to different dialectical varieties in both languages has exerted effect upon her linguistic production, especially in the case of her majority language, Spanish.

H has lived in three different locations of Spain: Madrid, Gijon (Asturias) and Ferrol (Galicia), with three different dialectical varieties of Spanish. There are few lexical and morphosyntactic differences between these varieties. At the phonological level, on the other hand, there are some

noticeable differences, especially as concerns suprasegmentals and, more specifically, intonation.

All of H's relatives come from Gijon (Asturias). While she stayed all day with her parents and extended family, she developed a variety of Spanish with a clear Asturian influence, even when the nuclear family lived in Ferrol. It was when she started attending a crèche in that town, Ferrol (2:7) that she began to show clear traces of Galician dialectical variety of Spanish, most notably in her intonation (Galician accent is well known to be a variety of Spanish with well-defined and distinguishable intonational patterns). By the time she stopped attending her kindergarten in Ferrol and shortly before the nuclear family moved to Madrid (2:11), H had acquired a clear "Galician accent". At 3:1 H started attending her current Nursery School in Madrid. By the time of writing this paragraph (3:4), her Galician accent has completely faded away and clear features of Madrid's dialectical variety have begun to show (extended use and even abuse of perfect tenses that are underused in Galician and Asturian varieties, vocabulary belonging to this area of Spain, etc.).

All of the above concerning H's development of Spanish is a perfectly normal linguistic development and underpins two notions: first, social networks and, very especially, educational environments exert a great influence in a child's linguistic development, and second, linguistic development is drastically and very quickly affected by changes in a child's surrounding society.

Regarding English, H's linguistic development has been much more stable. This is only logical as her almost exclusive interactions in English have been with only one person, her father, who always uses the same dialectical variety of English (Southern British English). A different input in other dialectical varieties comes from TV shows and cartoons, with General American English variety being extensively common in some of H's favourites: "The Mickey Mouse Club House", "Paw Patrol" and Disney's film "Frozen". So far, these shows have exerted a very limited influence on H's production of English, with only minor traces (rhoticity, flapping, and American realization of the vowel /ɒ/, for example in "Donald Duck") in her reproducing exact sentences or songs from these cartoons.

## 5.7. Discussion

H seems to be benefiting from the symbiosis of two different linguistic systems developing simultaneously in a synergetic fashion, and she can hold two-way, turn-taking conversations using relevant, creative sentences (in both languages), provided the topic is at her cognitive level (i.e., that she is talking about her feelings or daily routines). At 3:5, this is perfectly on schedule for a child's normal linguistic development.

H's communicative competence seems to correlate, quite accurately, to the amount of input in each language in her different, daily situations. Her preference for Spanish in oral production is quite logically related to it being the language most people use to talk to her in most situations. The fact that she plays in English also correlates to her watching TV shows in that language. Her receptive capabilities in both languages correlate to the fairly even amount of language input in both Spanish and English.

At the current point in time, elective bilingualism seems to have obtained a dark grey in H's monolingual-bilingual continuum. It is very difficult to assess how dark this grey is, as no system of indicators have been defined for this project, chiefly due to the difficulty of "measuring someone's bilingualism". However, the fact that she is able to understand nearly anything told to her in English, that she regularly plays on her own using English language, and that she sometimes uses English creatively in interactions makes a really dark shade of grey a safe bet.

It looks reasonable to assume that a notorious part of H's bilingualism may be attributed to all the media and English developing assets used by her father in support of his interactions in English with her. It becomes apparent that playing with her toys on her own in English is a by-product of her watching films and cartoons in English, mainly due to the fact that her toys are the starring characters in those shows.

## 5.8. Research hypothesis and questions

Elective bilingualism seems to be achieving results, but will probably need some kind of reinforcement with trips, or moving to a country where the minority language – English- is spoken, as H grows up and starts developing

social networks. This is already beginning to loom over the horizon: H uses English less and less by the day at the time of writing this paragraph, a logical outcome of her social relationships in Spanish at her nursery school.

The analysis of the case study in this research project shows that the use of available media and extensive use of games and songs proves invaluable in consolidating simultaneous bilingualism, mainly due to two main reasons: first, it raises exposure, and therefore the input of the minority language to the child, which otherwise would be limited to communication with the bilingual parent. If exposure drops below 20%, elective bilingualism has got little chance of success (Pearson, 2008, p. 116). By providing extra input, media helps shore up the child's minority language linguistic development and, therefore, promotes a bilingual development.

Second, when a child has fun while learning, there are inherent advantages to linguistic and cognitive developments. Music and games provide this fun bit necessary to promote learning. By carrying out activities pleasant to children in the minority language we are providing them with a framework within which they can achieve adequate linguistic development. The "game of shapes" (see transcript above) is a clear example of how a game related to images and visual learning can boost vocabulary learning in the minority language.

There is an important caveat in here, and it is that this study has covered a period between birth and 3:5, a period of life known as "early childhood" which comes right before a toddler grows into a boy or a girl and starts developing social networks. From the observations in this case study we can deduce that it is precisely the establishment of the first social networks what determines to a great extent language choice concerning productive skills. The working hypothesis for this study has been proven right because it was meant precisely for this case study, which covered a timespan of 3 years and 5 months from birth.

Another aspect that we should factor in is that this study has covered a period where language use includes oral skills only (understanding and speaking), as it is at 3:5 that children start learning to read but still cannot do, much less write. If by the time toddlers start establishing social networks they choose a majority language - logically the language spoken by their

peers - it seems reasonable to assume that reading and, especially, writing will be developed mainly in that majority language. If this is the case, simultaneous bilingualism may not prevail, unless other circumstances come into play.

Concerning research questions, elective bilingualism combined with an OPOL strategy in monolingual contexts is to be considered possible and desirable as a method to achieve BFLA. Its results may be variable, depending on many factors, the very child being the most determining of them all, as every child has a linguistic development of their own. Regardless of whether a bilingual adult will eventually follow a bilingual toddler or not and under which conditions this may ultimately happen, the elective bilingualism approach can definitively help achieve a fair degree of bilingualism in young children.

Even if elective bilingualism eventually fails by itself, without further circumstances concurring to produce adult bilinguals, it can help produce a toddler with *bilingual hues*. This means that elective bilingualism can help children become more tolerant, more accepting of diversity, and capable of more divergent thinking - i.e. more suitable to develop multiple solutions to a single problem.

Further research should aim at determining the extent of the impact that the setting up of new social networks has got on the linguistic development of a child that has been reared with elective bilingualism. Elective bilingualism is a relatively new discipline with a full range of possibilities yet to explore.

## 6. Conclusions

It has become clear that elective bilingualism works well at an initial stage, but needs further measures to shore up the minority language pole in the bilingual continuum as the child grows up and starts developing social networks. Therefore, as far as the working hypothesis for this dissertation is concerned, it has been confirmed.

Concerning BFLA, Elective Bilingualism in combination with an OPOL strategy is a viable and desirable tool to obtain positive results to

pave the way for a potentially bilingual child, in monolingual contexts, at least up until the point when a toddler starts developing social networks. These positive results manifest themselves in the form of *bilingual hues* that allow a toddler to develop productive oral skills in two languages, and provide him or her with metalinguistic knowledge of two languages that can serve as a frame for further linguistic development.

Because it finishes at precisely the time when a toddler starts setting up social networks, this project has not been able to determine how long the effects of elective bilingualism can last into early childhood or into the teenage period, or what reinforcements may be needed to shore up its early achievements.

## 7. Advice to parents who opt for elective bilingualism

It is worth dedicating a few lines to provide other parents who may try to follow this method with tips based on the author's experience.

The most important aspect to be aware of when considering the asymmetry implicit in elective bilingualism is that the minority language will need fostering, encouragement and coaxing, but never coercion. This simple rule the author has followed as rigorously as possible, to good avail. Using parental discourse strategies that tend towards the monolingual end (of the minority language), such as minimal grasp, expressed guess or repetition is an excellent approach to this much needed coaxing, without forcing, because they enable a parent to encourage the use of the minority language in a non-imposing fashion.

As much exposure as possible to the minority language is also needed. Nowadays, it is easy to have online access to any kind of media in many different languages. If the minority language in your case is English, as has been the case of the author, material available is endless. Therefore, you may want to make a selection of what would be best for you to offer to your child. Recommendations:

- Music is a must. Music fosters cognitive and linguistic development, and almost every child loves it. Choose games and cartoons that make extensive use of nursery rhymes and other

simple, educational, funny songs. Play music when your child can associate it with pleasant moments, such as tea-time or bath time. Sing as much as you can to and with them.

• Set the audio in your TV shows and cartoons to the minority language whenever possible. If your minority language is English, that should be almost always. If you do this from the very beginning in a consistent manner, your child can reach a stage where she does not want to watch TV in the majority language.

• Select contents adequate to your child's age and avoid especially cartoons with fight-related contents that may be visually attractive to them but teach little. Go for simple, childish cartoons with songs and games.

• Select games that can have visual associations (such as flash cards), which foster lexical development (i.e., learning vocabulary). Our brain works mainly with images. Anything that is learnt visually, through images, remains in our long-term memory.

• Read frequently and abundantly to your child. Reading fosters linguistic development, not surprisingly. Make sure you use books of tales full of images.

• Play games in the minority language as much as you can. The pleasant feeling of having fun is directly related to a higher, quicker degree of learning. By associating the minority language with happy moments, your child will feel prone to use it and more comfortable when you use it; they will learn it in a more efficient manner; and, last but not least, you will enjoy those moments and cherish those memories forever.

Finally, do not be afraid of what other people may think or say about you speaking a minority language that it is clearly not your L1. Do not be shy, use it. Bilingualism promotes tolerance and acceptance of otherness, it is associated with positive cognitive development, and it will help your child in their career. Do not let others' ignorance or prejudice stop you

from providing these advantages to your son or daughter. Likewise, do not be worried about your lack of fluency or strong accent having a negative impact on your child's linguistic development. Anything that fosters bilingualism is positive. By using another language, you are facilitating your child's use of it. If you do not seem to find the right word or sentence, use a synonym or a circumlocution / periphrasis and look up later what you wanted to say. If you are not sure about a word's pronunciation, use a synonym and find out later how that word is pronounced. You do not need a complete mastery of an L2, only a fair level of proficiency and a good deal of will to use it.

Always be supportive of your child's development, and never make fun of them. Although codemixing can be hilarious, try not to laugh at your child's mixed utterances in front of them, or comment on what they said in a comical manner. It may give them the wrong feeling that they are doing something they should not do. A smile is always more supportive (and more elegant) than a laughter.

**Notes**

[1] L1 is someone's first language or mother tongue, whereas L2 is someone's second language or languages.

[2] Figure taken from Pearson, 2008.

[3] The two squirrels in "The Mickey Mouse Club House" show are named Dale and Chip.

[4] Notice that words with a higher morphosyntactic load in this sentence are in English, while the word with a higher lexical load, umbrella, is in Spanish ("*paraguas*"). This is not necessarily the case in all instances of H's codemixing events, but this is representative of how bilingualism may work in First Language Acquisition, with one language exerting the role of "frame", and the other one delivering the "adequate" words with the "precise meaning".

[5] In Spanish, shaving is reflexive, so a man "shaves himself". The right sentence would have been: *Papá, ¿te afeitaste?*

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## APPENDIX 1. H'S PARENTS EDUCATIONAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS.

|  | **H's mother** | **H's father** |
|---|---|---|
| Education | BA level education (Law related) | MA level education (Linguistics, English Language, International Politics, Military Graduation) |
| Languages | Spanish: L1<br>English: Upper-Intermediate. B2 Level (Escuela Oficial de Idiomas).<br>French: Upper-Intermediate. B1 Level (Escuela Oficial de Idiomas). | Spanish: L1<br>English: native-like proficiency (5-year degree in English Philology).<br>French: Upper-Intermediate. B1 Level (Escuela Oficial de Idiomas).<br>Italian: Basic (1-year course in his degree in English Philology). |