



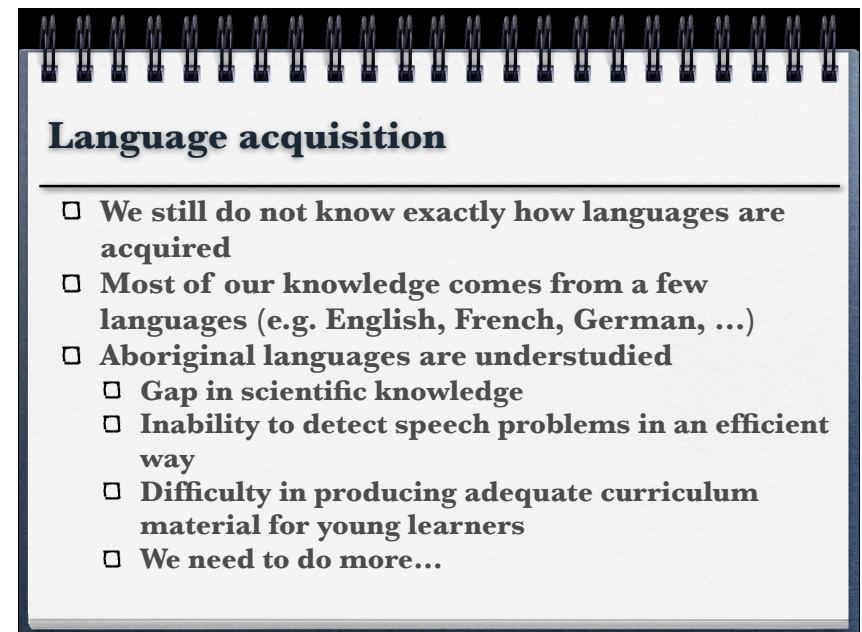
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Bilingualism and second language education

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Misconceptions about bilingualism

- ❑ Many people think that a multilingual environment may cause speech difficulties or delays
 - ❑ That children have more difficulties or need more time to acquire language
 - ❑ That children are confused between their multiple languages
 - ❑ ...
- ❑ Science has clearly demonstrated that nothing of this is true. The reality is quite different.

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Myths about bilingualism

- ❑ *Learning two languages confuses a child and lowers his intelligence*
 - ❑ Bilinguals are by all means comparable to monolinguals and in fact better than monolinguals at some tasks
- ❑ *A child should learn one language properly first; then you can start teaching the other*
 - ❑ Children who learn two languages in a loving, supportive environment learn them both well
 - ❑ Children who learn two languages in a stressful environment may have language development problems, just like monolinguals

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Myths about bilingualism (cont'd)

- ❑ *A child who learns two languages won't feel at home in either of them*
 - ❑ Children will feel at home with as many languages as they can culturally identify with
- ❑ *Bilinguals have to translate from their weaker to their stronger language*
 - ❑ Bilinguals can think both their languages; there is no translation needed at all
- ❑ *Bilinguals have split personalities*
 - ❑ All they have is access to different cultures and therefore will behave according to the cultural expectations related to the language they speak

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Myths about bilingualism (cont'd)

- ❑ *Real bilinguals never mix their languages. Those who do are confused 'semi-linguals'*
 - ❑ Some leaking of a language into another one is normal...
 - ❑ Analogies, false-friends, minor pronunciation issues, etc.
 - ❑ ...but does not arise because of confusion
 - ❑ A lot of the interference is in fact conscious (e.g. code-switching)
 - ❑ Semi-lingualism is rare and only occurs in learning situations that are stressful or when there is not enough language input to the child

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Myths about bilingualism (cont'd)

- ❑ *Bilingualism is a charming exception, but monolingualism is of course the rule*
 - ❑ More than half of the world's population is multilingual. Can we call bilingualism exceptional?
- ❑ *If you don't follow the rules exactly, your child will never manage to learn both languages*
 - ❑ Children learn both languages regardless of the pattern of exposure
- ❑ *People really can't learn a language after age X*
 - ❑ People can learn valuable language skills at any age

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What is TRUE about bilingualism

- ❑ The vast majority of speakers in the world are bilingual, trilingual, or speak even more languages
- ❑ Raising children in multilingual environment benefits the child's linguistic and general cognitive development for other topics such as mathematics, science, logical thinking, ...
- ❑ After they are acquired, the two languages are not mixed or confused
 - ❑ They are separate; one language does not 'pollute' the other

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There are only benefits to learning more than one languages



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When should the second language be introduced to the child?

- The earlier, the better, but:
- Age does not determine everything
 - First language: within first 4-6 years of life
 - Second language: within first 10-12 years of life
 - Becomes more difficult after that, but definitely not impossible
- More important for success
 - Motivation, encouragement
 - Second language use
 - Literacy: reading, writing
- In brief, second language learning has to go beyond being just one more thing to do at school

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Factors affecting second language learning in a multicultural context

- Language attitudes
 - Role of the language instructors in promoting bilingualism (instead of the use of one language only)
 - Role of the caregivers in fostering a positive, motivating learning environment
- Involvement from both educators and caregivers
 - The young learner is facing a difficult situation
 - This fact needs to be acknowledged by everyone
 - Everyone need to make an active contribution to the learning process
 - ...educators/schooling just can't do everything...

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Factors affecting second language learning in a multicultural context

- (Mis-)communication between educators and students
 - Pragmatic differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal conversations
 - At times, absence of communication outside of the classroom setting
- Cultural discontinuity between home and school
 - Skills valued at home versus at school
 - The bicultural context inherent to bilingual has to transcend the school system
 - Children need to be aware of, and value, their bilingual/bicultural identity

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Factors affecting second language learning in a multicultural context

- Child's perception of the bilingual curriculum
 - Children need to know why learning more than one language is important
 - Connection with their native culture
 - Connection with the 'outer' world
- Educators need to know about the Aboriginal language and culture
 - This is true for every academic subject addressed in class, not only for language classes

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The relations between the L1 and the L2

- There are sound educational reasons to establish literacy in the L1 before literacy in L2
 - Children's linguistic/cultural identity and pride
 - Respect for the home language
 - Access to native literature
- There are no actual disadvantages
 - Knowledge more easily acquired through the L1
 - Concepts taught in the L1 remain valid in the L2
 - Skills (e.g. literacy, concepts, academic content) transcend languages
 - Ex: a good writer in L1 will also be a good writer in L2; a bad writer in L2 is also bad in L1...

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One area of potential confusion: The writing system

- Cree syllabic system versus French/English roman system
 - Invoke two different levels of linguistic representation
 - Research demonstrates that both are independent even though inter-connected
 - Impose two different systems of abstraction
 - Cree syllabics represents 'deleted' syllables/sounds
 - French/English sound-to-letter associations are not always obvious (to say the least)

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One area of potential confusion: The writing system

- Challenge, in light of everything discussed today:
 - How can the transition be best achieved?
 - Are the educators prepared to introduce such a transitions?
 - Are the caregivers and educators all supportive of the bilingual programs
 - Are the children encouraged to tackle the challenge in a positive way
 - All this is *fun* if introduced in a proper way
 - Through the transition, children learn more than an additional writing system; they develop analytical skills useful in lots of other areas

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Discussion

- Bilingual speakers:
 - Have better scores at school, not only in languages but across all disciplines
 - Have more opportunities in life
- The same is true for all bilingual learners
 - If they start learning their second language some time within the first 10-12 years of life
- Even after age 10-12, it is not too late, it is just a little more difficult, but may be more fun too
- What is most important is
 - To be motivated and encouraged
 - To gain from positive experience

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Thanks!

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