



# Workbook

## E.N.J.O.Y. RAISING CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE LANGUAGES©

*for parents of 4-10 year-olds*

by Ute Limacher-Riebold PhD



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This workbook was designed for the *Ute's International Lounge Academy* course *E.N.J.O.Y. Raising children with multiple languages – for parents of 4 to 10 year old children* and is completed with videos that are made accessible for each buyer.

Please be aware that the videos will be updated regularly and buyers will be notified about every change and update. Every buyer who unsubscribes automatically loses the access to the audio-, video- and written material added to this Workbook.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ute Limacher-Riebold PhD is a multilingual Intercultural Language Consultant and Trainer at *Ute's International Lounge*. She holds a PhD in Romance Philology, has taught Italian historical linguistics at the Department of Romance Studies of the University of Zurich, is a researcher and the author of, among others, *The Toolbox for Multilingual Families* and its *Workbook*, and *How to raise bilingual children*. She is a trained TESFL, ESL, and Language Instructor and Speech and Language Specialist.

In her practice, Ute bridges between research and practice as a linguist and life long international. She offers tailored advice, practical solutions and support for parents who raise their children abroad with multiple languages and cultures.

She helps multilingual families find the most suitable strategies, practical solutions and resources, to transmit and maintain their home languages and cultures, whilst embracing others.

Ute is fluent in German, Italian, French, English, Dutch and Swiss German, and currently improves her fluency in Spanish and Korean. She lives in the Netherlands with her husband and three older children who are multilingual too.

# ABOUT UTE'S E.N.J.O.Y. PROGRAM

**E.N.J.O.Y.©** is a program Ute designed in 2014 and that has proven to be very successful for several hundreds of internationals.

**ENJOY** is not only a word with positive connotation, but also an acronym that stands for **Enter well, Navigate, Join, Organize** and **Yes!** (celebrate!), which are recommended steps to take in any kind of transition in life to render it as successful and effective as possible.

- **Enter well** is the step that helps us start off on the right foot.
- **Navigate** is where we find out what to expect and the many options we have, and determine what works for us and our family.
- **Join** is the step where we explore and define our village, the community that supports us and our family.
- **Organize** is where we set goals and start arranging them in the most effective way.
- **Yes!** is where we assess what we have decided and implemented.

The process doesn't end with the last step. With the tools offered by this program, you will be able to come back to each step whenever necessary, to update and to adapt your implementation of the steps throughout time.

## HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This *Workbook* is integral part of the self-paced online course ***E.N.J.O.Y. Raising children with multiple languages for parents of 4-10 year-old children\****. It is recommended that you use this workbook in its digital version, enter the asked input directly on your device (preferably computer or tablet) and access resources provided via links and QR codes. You are, of course, free to print some pages of it – but, please, for your personal use only.

While following the different videos and audio files, you will be asked to complete parts of the workbook, answer questions and do specific tasks, explore some activities and download or access resources to gather further information.

For some tasks and questions you might need time to reflect, others will come more easily. You may even prefer answering some questions only after having watched all the videos and/or read the whole book.

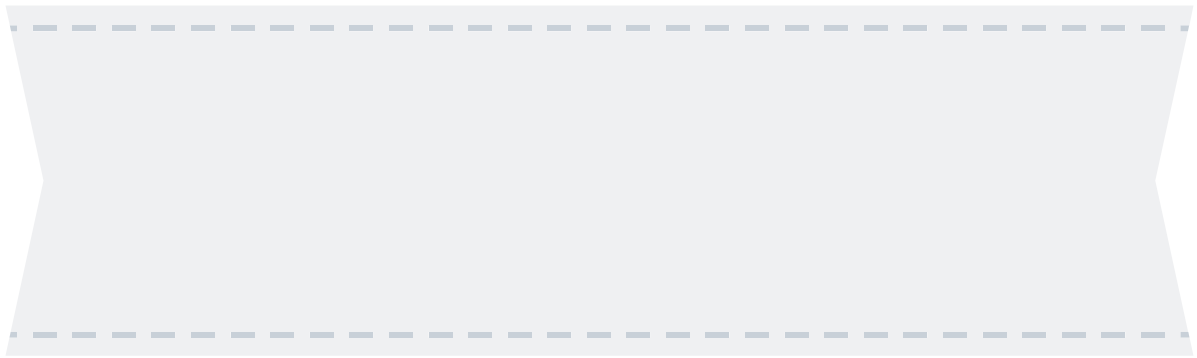
Should you need any help with completing the workbook, or if you would like to discuss parts of it, please ask in the private facebook group *Ute's International Lounge Academy*, or contact me directly at *academyUIL@gmail.com* with the subject **"Q:Raising multilinguals (2)"**.

I hope this book and the accompanying videos will help you to enjoy your multilingual journey.



\*<https://academy.utesinternationalounge.com>

*This workbook  
belongs to*



## ENTER WELL



When we raise our children with multiple languages, we are up for a long journey, some compare it to a marathon. This journey is subjected to changes that require modifications and adaptations.

As we might encounter situations that we didn't expect at the beginning of the journey, it is helpful to be prepared for some of the most common situations that can occur.

Answering some questions beforehand allows us to get clearer on the language goals we set for our children and ourselves:

- What languages do we use as parents?
- What languages do/will we use with our children?
- What language strategy or strategies suit our family?
- What languages will our children use, and how and when will they use them?
- What levels of fluency will they need to attain in each language?
- When should they attain those levels?
- How can we support our children at home to not only speak, but (possibly) also read and write in those languages?

Even for parents who grew up with multiple languages, some of these questions are not easy to answer. Furthermore, each family has a unique language constellation that deserves an individual solution, tailored to the family at a particular moment of their journey.

There are many ways to transmit and foster home and community languages: you can find out which ways best suit your family.

## ENTER WELL

### Who is multilingual?

In this book I use the term *multilingual* since an increasing number of families uses more than two languages on a regular basis. Although *multilingual* is usually attributed to societies, whereas the correct term for individuals would be *plurilingual*, I use the term *multilingual* for the following reasons:

- Whenever we acquire or use a language, we do so in a context, more precisely in an interaction with one or more persons.
- We use languages with the intent to communicate and connect, to understand others and make ourselves understood by another person, a group, or a community, which involves verbal and non-verbal interactions.

Therefore, a *multilingual person* is always someone who functions with *multiple codes* (aka languages) in a **micro society** like a family, and/or a **meso-** or **macro society**, thus in a group of persons or a community, and the society as a whole or a nation respectively.



**micro society**

(family)

**meso society**

(community / group)

**macro society**

(society as a whole /  
nation)

## ENTER WELL

I also consider someone to be multilingual who uses two or more sign languages – even though sign language is not a recognized language in all countries of the world yet.

People who communicate by using two or more sign languages, are called *sign bilinguals* and are therefore also considered to be multilingual.

People who use one or more sign languages as well as verbal languages, are called *bi-modal* or *multi-modal* multilinguals as they use two kind of modes to communicate: verbal and non-verbal.

A multilingual person is someone who uses two or more languages or dialects, or sign languages, in their everyday life. – Ute Limacher-Riebold

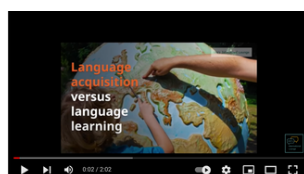
Please note that it is **not** important:

- what **level of fluency in a language** one has
- that all **language skills** are equally developed
- at which **age** the languages are **acquired** or **learned**

With regard to the difference between ***acquiring*** and ***learning a language***, please read the post and/or watch **this video**:



### Language acquisition vs language learning



## ENTER WELL



### Let's start with you

I invite you to think about your own experience with acquiring and learning languages, because **our own experience has an impact on how we transmit the languages to our children**, and on **how our children experience learning languages**.

**What languages did you acquire and learn, and when?**

**Where did you acquire/learn your languages?**

*(in the country where they are officially spoken or elsewhere?)*

**How did you acquire or learn them?**

*With your parents, a nanny, grandparents, at school, etc.*

## ENTER WELL

**What made it easy or difficult for you to learn the languages?**

**What worked for you?**

(reading comics, listening to audio materials, etc.)

**What didn't work for you?**

(what would you do differently now)

## **ENTER WELL**

**What languages do you use on a daily/weekly basis?**

**How do you experience switching back and forth between your languages?**

**How is the communication with your partner/ other adult who you speak with on a regular basis?**

(are there any situations where the communication doesn't flow, there are misunderstandings, resentments, judgments, etc.?)

## **ENTER WELL**

**Is there anything you would like to change or that you think could be better with respect to your language use?**

**What are the major points you find challenging or difficult in the communication with your partner and/or your child right now?**

**What is your attitude towards the languages you use at home, with your partner/another caregiver and with the children?**

## **ENTER WELL**

**Are you currently learning a language?  
Which one and how?**

**Does your child observe you learning the language (make mistakes, enjoy learning it, overcome hurdles, etc.)?**

**What do you enjoy and find interesting while learning a new language?**

## ENTER WELL

### Find the official CEFR Self-Assessment grid [here](#)

The self-assessment grid as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) illustrates the levels of proficiency.

It presents 34 scales of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing activities.

"In order to orient learners, teachers and other users within the educational system for some practical purpose, a more detailed overview is necessary. Table 2 is a draft for a self-assessment orientation tool intended to help learners to profile their main language skills, and decide at which level they might look at a checklist of more detailed descriptors in order to self-assess their level of proficiency."

PROFICIENT USER	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
INDEPENDENT USER	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
BASIC USER	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

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## ENTER WELL

### Maintaining our languages abroad

It is not easy to maintain our languages when living abroad.

How much do you use your languages, and how do you foster your language skills such as understanding of new contexts, reading and writing?

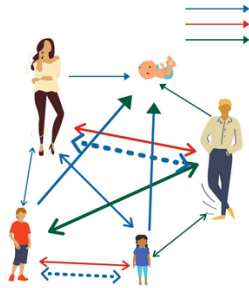
Some tips to keep your language *alive*:

- **Listen to the radio** in the target language to keep up to date with current expressions.
- **Choose a resource** (TV, movies, internet, podcasts) that you enjoy listening or following about topics you like.
- **Read** books, newspapers, magazines, etc. in the target language; join or start a reading group.
- **Find a group of people to talk with – online and/or offline.**



## The Children's Use of Languages

1) What languages do you use with your children, when?



(at home)

(outside home)

You can indicate above what languages your child uses at home and outside of home with different people.

# ENTER WELL



2) What language strategy/strategies work(ed) for you until now?  
(Here is my video about **Language Strategies in Multilingual Families**)

## ENTER WELL



**3) What languages are your children using and under what circumstance?**

**4) Are they using your home languages in informal and formal settings, i.e. with friends but also with other adults?**

**5) Does the current language proficiency level of your children meet your expectations?**

## ENTER WELL



**Which languages do your children need on a daily basis?**  
(to function at home, at school and in society)

**Which languages are additional ones? Which languages are "nice to have/know"?**

## ENTER WELL



Which are the languages your children really **NEED** and that would be rather in the **foreground** and which ones can be placed in the **background**. Please think about what this means for your and your children's regular use of languages.

Languages in the background



Languages in the foreground





## Your Language Friendly Home

How **accepting** and **welcoming** are you towards your partner's language(s)?

Use the same list to assess how accepting and welcoming your partner (or other adults in your household) is towards your language(s).

- I have strong negative feelings for that language
- I don't like the language
- I don't like the language, but I understand/speak/read/write it
- I wish I could like it
- I like the language but don't understand it
- I like the language and understand it
- I speak the language
- I speak, read and write the language
- I am fluent in the language

How do your **children experience** the different **languages at home**? Is one more supported, more used and valued than the other(s)?

## ENTER WELL

### A Language Friendly Home



A home where there is no hierarchy between the languages used by family members, where there is no judgment about which language is more "important", "nicer", "better", etc. is a language friendly home.

Every language is important for someone, somewhere in the world. Thus, if a language that is "minoritized" where you currently live, i.e. is not used by a larger community, not supported at school, etc., this doesn't mean that it is not important enough to be maintained, fostered and nurtured.

If anyone in your core family considers a language or dialect important, your home should be a "somewhere" where it is used and welcomed.

The use of a language or dialect in our family should **never** become the reason for a dispute or a power struggle.

"The support and inclusion we wish for all our family languages in society starts at home."

– Ute Limacher-Riebold

## ENTER WELL

### Language Rights

The freedom to express ourselves through language is a fundamental human right.

Communicating our thoughts, ideas, wishes and needs with those around us is key to basic survival.

Please inform yourself about the rights to use your languages in the place you live.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989)** conceptualizes the child as "a competent, contributing social actor" with rights to their languages and cultures.



- Please download **the infographic in a child friendly language**
- Find more information about the **Language Policy in the EU**
- The **Charter of Fundamental Rights** (European Union Law)
- Inform yourself about the **mother tongue + 2 model – promoting language learning and linguistic diversity** in EU countries

As the *Council of Europe* (2003) defines multilingualism as "the presence of several languages in a given space independently of those who use them", the coexistence of languages is suggested and any sense of hierarchy is removed.

## ENTER WELL



The way we welcome our partner's languages and the way our languages are welcomed or included in the community and broader society our children grow up in, have a significant impact on how our children perceive their heritage languages and cultures.

The more accepting and inclusive we are towards all the languages and dialects in our family, the better. Parents can create a safe environment where each language is valued and fostered.

We don't always have the power to influence our community or society, therefore a healthy and supportive environment at home is the best start we can offer to our children – not only with regard to the languages but also the cultures, the beliefs and traditions we transmit to them.

Please take the time to explore the community you live in with regards to how welcoming it is towards your culture and your language or dialect. Some languages might be perceived as more prestigious, others are considered as "not important enough".

"Make sure that within your family you equally value and support your home languages, as if you were living in all the countries your languages come from at once!"  
– Ute Limacher-Riebold

## ENTER WELL



### What is your experience so far?

Please complete the sentences:

**When we use our language outside of home (the bus, shop, etc.), people usually...**

**When we use our language at preschool/school, the general reaction is...**

**When our neighbours hear us speak our language, they...**

**Make sure you and your children feel safe  
when using your languages!**

## ENTER WELL

# How to respond to people who express their doubts about what we are doing



We will always encounter people who doubt or judge what we are doing with regard to raising our children with multiple languages. **On my site** I share 26 so called "myths" about bi/multilingualism (and there are probably many more!).

Most of these are assumptions and misunderstandings which originate from a place of fear.

We are all sceptic when it comes to something we don't know much about, and we all have biases.

When we encounter unforeseen circumstances, being informed and prepared enables us to have coping mechanisms ready to respond in the best possible way.

The best way to respond to resistance, prejudices, judgmental comments, etc., is to **take an inner step back** and always **assume that people have the best intentions**.

Most of the time people are just looking at the situation from another perspective: try to find out which one.

## ENTER WELL



It is important to **assess the situation** to decide whether *walking away* is better than getting into an argument. Especially if our children are present, we don't want them to witness a heated discussion about our language, our culture, the way we are and do things – no matter if this happens with family, friends, teachers, authority persons or strangers.

It is better to avoid asking the person "why" he/she is saying something controversial, since the use of "why" might evoke a defense reaction and it will not improve communication. When we ask "why", we implicitly express doubt about what the other person is saying or doing – we judge. Responding to judgment with judgment is never going to ease the situation and is not efficient communication style.

If we ask instead "What makes you say this?" or "What exactly do you mean?", we signalize our interest and best intentions to understand where the other person is coming from.

We can step step into the other person's shoes (empathically) and continue by saying "oh, so what you say is that...." – thus reformulating what they just said.

In response, the other person will then make sure to reformulate it in a way that is usually less confrontational.

Most of the time, people express their doubts because they are worried, sad about their own experience, or just curious to know how we manage to make this all work.

## ENTER WELL

Whenever confronted with people who criticize what we are doing, we should make sure that **language does *not* become a reason for disputes.**

### Choose your battles wisely!

Disputes will reflect only negatively on our and our children's relationship with that person, and their feeling towards them, us, the language and the culture!

In the *JOIN* section, I explain how you can find supportive people.

## ENTER WELL



## Language Friendly Preschools and Schools

When choosing the school for your children, you probably have a list of expectations that are based on your and your partner's personal experience, as well as information you gathered to make a sound decision.

I invite you to have a look at my checklist to "find the right school" that you can complete as you wish.



In this checklist I mention that the school should be *language friendly* – which means welcoming and understanding towards other languages and cultures.

I invite you to have a look at the website of **Language Friendly School** to get some examples of what these schools look like and do in order to be more "language friendly".



For more details you can also watch the **interview with Dr. Ellen-Rose Kambell**.

"The support and inclusion we wish for all our family languages in the society starts at home."  
– Ute Limacher-Riebold



### Changes in Language Use

When our children are 4 to 10 years old, they have experienced that they need to use their languages (and registers: formal or informal for example) in **certain circumstances** and in **specific social settings**.

The older our children become, the more they realize that people in their lives use languages in different ways than they do, that they have other attitudes toward the languages our children use and that they have to find ways to accept and deal with this.

For us parents it is helpful to observe the way our children react to a variety of social situations where different languages are used.

I encourage you to foster a **multilingual mindset** that goes beyond the simple use of different languages. It has to do with accepting and welcoming other languages in a non-judgmental way.

## NAVIGATE



### Language Shift

There will always be languages that our children are using more regularly. Depending on the situation and their developmental phase, some languages will be more dominant, and others more in the background. When our children are experiencing change, some factors can affect their language use.

During these phases, it is sometimes necessary to **adjust the family language strategy** and increase the quality language input in the target language(s).

Possible reasons for a shift and change in language use are:

- starting daycare / preschool / school
- illness of a child or of a family member
- travelling parent
- separation of parents
- arrival of a sibling
- a move

These situations usually cause that there is less time available to dedicate to the children.

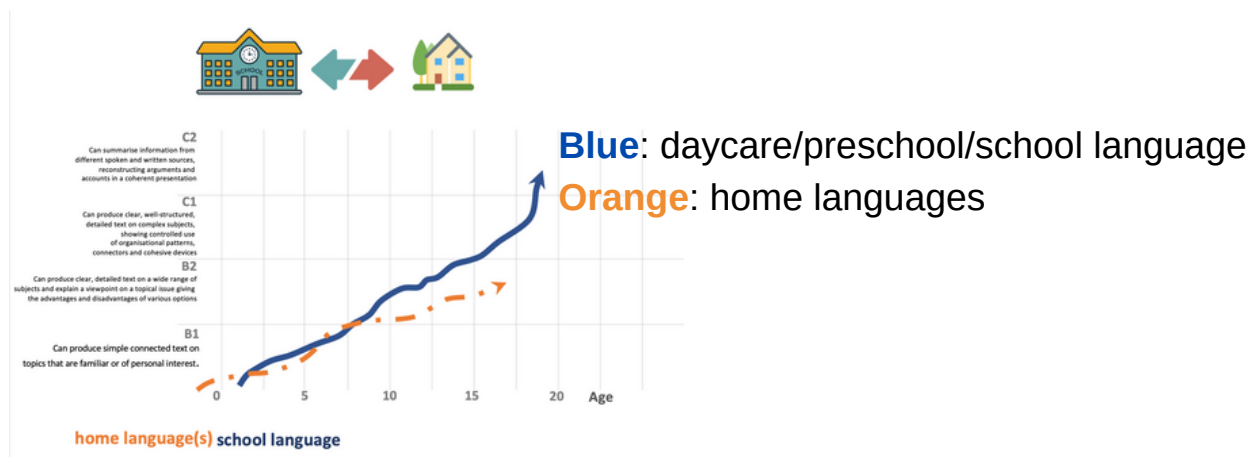
"Language use and language development in multilinguals is never synchronized. Languages are acquired and learned in **different situations**, with **different people** and for **different purposes**. And there are always phases where the development of one (or more) languages slows down, whilst the development of others accelerates."

– Ute Limacher-Riebold

# NAVIGATE



When our children start attending daycare, preschool or school in an additional language, language shift is a natural consequence of their changing need of languages in their daily life. Sometimes, the home languages tend to "plateau" as they are not fostered as much as before.

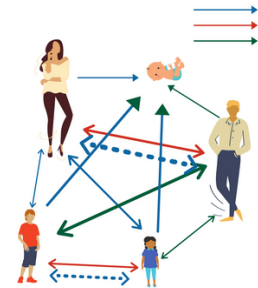


## Language Shift does NOT automatically lead to Language Loss!

When languages have been acquired and learned to a certain level of fluency, you can hardly lose them. Whenever we learn a new language, this new language competes with the languages we already know. When our children attend school in a new language, all the attention is directed to this new language because they are expected to learn it as quickly and thoroughly as possible. But as long as the other languages are used and fostered regularly, our children will continue improving their language skills.

# NAVIGATE

## Negotiating Language Use



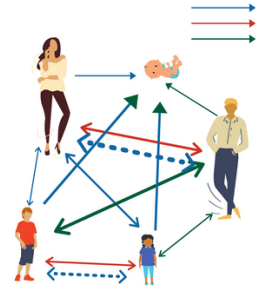
With 4 to 10 year old children we can negotiate language use – at home and outside.

We can discuss how to use our languages so that they are fostered in the most effective way, i.e. such that none of our languages will be neglected to the extent of being lost.

**What languages would you agree to speak at home?**

**What languages would you speak outside of home?**

## NAVIGATE



**"Where there is a *need* there is a way"**

The main reason for our children to prefer the "other" language is that they are more confident in it: they are more spontaneous, they use it at a faster pace, they know the terms and expressions they want to use to express their thoughts.

**Ask your child about the reasons they prefer NOT to use a specific language and list them up here below:**

Here are some reasons why children might prefer **not** to speak a language:

1. the language is too complicated compared to the others
2. they don't like the sounds of it
3. they don't like themselves when they speak it
4. their peers or someone else expressed their disliking of the language
5. they feel that the language is not important enough, not valued, or stigmatized

## NAVIGATE

If your child's reason matches one in either of the bullet points 1 to 3, we can make the language use easier, more appealing.

Please have a look at the videos on **Activities for Multilingual Families** that are inspired by the **Toolbox for Multilingual Families**.



If the reasons match one in either of bullet points 4 and 5, or similar ones, you should explore them more in detail:

- Who expressed the disliking?
- How can we make sure our language is accepted by the group or broader community?

Please address the issue with your children when they are ready to discuss about it.

If there is an issue at school – e.g. a teacher or a peer expressed some disliking of our home language – it is important to address this matter.

The aim should be to search for support, so that our children are proud again to use our languages. – Have a look at the site of the **Language Friendly School** for ideas to share with your school.

## NAVIGATE

### Motivating Children to Use the Target Language

Many parents ask me what they should do if their **children don't reply in the target language**.

Let's start with *us*, adults:

**What would make *us* use our language more?**

**What makes *us* enjoy our language?**

## NAVIGATE

**What motivates your child to talk in the target language?**

**What are your child's favourite topics at the moment?**

**What are the resources your child likes the most? (make sure to have them accessible in the target language)**

How to motivate children to speak a language:



## NAVIGATE

It is important to listen to what your children are talking about and to not focus too much on which language they chose. It will help you chime in with your knowledge about the topic in your language, and you'll naturally provide your child with the necessary terms, expressions, etc. And if you struggle finding the terms about a specific topic, involve your child in finding them in a dictionary, by looking it up online or watching a short video together and continue the conversation afterwards.

If your child makes mistakes in your language during these kind of "explorative conversations", it is most probably not the right moment to start correcting them.

Four year olds might be more receptive for you modeling the "right way" to form sentences, use words, etc., than your seven to ten year-olds.

When your child shows clear signs of rejection to your modeling, and you want the conversation to continue, try with saying "oh silly me, I shouldn't have said that..." and see how your child reacts. When we don't take the moments too seriously when we fail with our strategy to correct or suggest the right word or expression, our children will be more prone to communicate with us, because the focus will be on the communication, the connection, and not on the language or use of the language.

A successful strategy is to say "hm... sorry, what were you just saying", thus sounding a bit distracted by our thoughts or background noises. This interjection interrupts the flow of the conversation and can become a trigger for your child to switch to the expected language. But before using this strategy, please "read the air" and find out if your child would respond in the desired way or not!

## NAVIGATE

If your aim is to fully connect with your children and to have an effective communication experience, give them your full attention! There is nothing more powerful than knowing that the other person is fully listening to you, following your train of thoughts with the intention to connect.

And if your children are struggling to find the right word and you know they might know it, give them time to find it themselves.

Set up some goals with your children in a collaborative way:

**When do we talk language Yellow?**

**When do we talk language Green?**

(e.g. Maybe one at breakfast, the other one in the weekends?)

Picking **Time and Place** carefully allows you to meet each person's needs – choose moments when your children are more prone to use the target language.



Please watch the interviews with **Dr. Sabine Little**, **Prof. Janice Nakamura** and **Prof. Elizabeth Lanza** about this topic.

Furthermore, I invite you to watch my videos on **Code Switching and Code Mixing**, as well as on **Passive/Receptive language use** and skills and my presentation about **Balancing Home Languages and School Languages**.

## NAVIGATE



## Introducing a New Language at Home

### Which languages to keep?

When introducing new languages at home, it is important to make sure to keep those that we speak with our children as primary language(s), and to not change it to a new one that our children still need to learn.

If you are unsure if you chose the right language check in this list of criteria I talk about in my course for parents of 0 to 4 year-old children:

You should be able to answer **yes** to the following questions:

- Can I make subtle **jokes** in the language?
- Can I express **how I feel** in the language?
- Can I express **how my child feels** in the language?
- Can I sing **lullabies, nursery songs**, and do I know **rhymes** in the language?
- Can I talk about family **anecdotes** in the language?
- Can I give **compliments** and **comfort** in the language?
- Can I **be spontaneous** in the language? (like "watch out!", "stop!", etc.)

If you need to look up words in the primary language you are speaking with your children, please contact me to find our how to make some adjustments.

## NAVIGATE

Multilinguals "always have two to four languages that are more dominant" (Larissa Aronin), namely the ones they are more confident using and that they use on a regular basis.

### Dominant Language Constellation (by Larissa Aronin)



All languages we acquire(d) or learn(ed) are retrievable to some extent, whenever needed.

The languages in the forefront are just quicker for us to reach (and use).

There needs to be a solid reason for a new language to be added as it will put the system, the way we use our languages, a bit out of balance (at least for a certain time).

### Here are three valid reasons for us to add a language:

- it is one our children are already exposed to
- it is one our children need on a daily basis
- it is one our children like, i.e. are very interested in

## NAVIGATE

### When to add a new language

When it comes to adding new languages to those we already use at home, it is easy to get overly enthusiastic, especially when our children seem to have no problem with all the other languages.

I always suggest though to consider the current situation – if it is just a language "nice to know", we can expose our child to it sporadically. If it is a language our children will need in a few months or years because we will move to a country where it is the majority language, we will invest more time and effort in teaching it to our children.

#### **Are your children ready for the new language?**

##### **Do they show genuine interest?**

Our children's interest in a new language (or any other skill) doesn't necessarily mean that they are up for a life long commitment!

Sometimes basic access to the new language is all they are looking for.

If it's a language "nice to know" (i.e. there is no urge or need to add it), it might be sufficient to expose our children to it only occasionally.

**Please watch my video about "the earlier the better?".**

## NAVIGATE

If it is about a language we need in a few months or years because we are planning to move to another country, we may want to hire a teacher or get an au-pair that helps us foster the new language in an efficient and consistent way.

Whenever adding a new language, make sure to assess where your children currently stay in their language development in all of their languages, and how they respond to using them all.

Previously, I had ask you to write down when your children use their languages and with whom:

- What would change if you add the new language?
- Does the language have the same (or a similar) alphabet as the ones your child already knows?
- How will you, as a parent or caregiver, introduce it? Maybe use it yourself?
- What is your involvement and role in this new commitment?

Whatever language you choose and when, make sure to **set realistic language goals!**



I invite you to watch the **[interview with Prof. Mila Schwartz](#)** about the importance of the role of the child when using the language strategy.



## Language Development of 4-10 yo's

The bilingual or multilingual child, like the multilingual adult, will develop competencies in each language 'to the extent required by his or her needs and those of the environment.'

– Prof. Erika Hoff ([watch the interview here](#))

"The roots of every plant seek out, from among the many substances which the soil contains, only those which they need."

Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*.

Our children's brains develop the most in the first few years. Neuronal paths are built while performing tasks over and over again, and efficiency is achieved by reinforcing the connections. This process occurs repeatedly with the building rate of connections declining after early childhood. But this decline does **not** mean that we are not able to learn later of course.

Maria Montessori distinguishes between the *absorbent mind* of babies, infants and children up to four or six year olds, and the *conscious mind* when referring to children between six and ten years old.

To better understand the development of the child's brain, please watch the videos published by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University about the basic architecture of the brain:



**Experiences build brain architecture**  
**Serve and Return interaction shapes brain circuitry**

## NAVIGATE

I also invite you to watch the [interview with Prof. Arturo Hernandez](#) about the difference on how children and adults learn languages differently.

### The earlier the better?

You might have heard that when it comes to language learning, “the sooner the better”, that after a certain age, one can not learn a language to a high level of proficiency anymore.

This is not true! Everyone can learn a language also later in life, and also up to a high level of proficiency.

There is no right or wrong when learning new languages. The main difference is in how efficient we can do it.

If these new languages are supported at school or in the community and our children get to use them regularly, it is more likely that they will attain a higher level of fluency.

Read my post about this topic, and find some links to further readings and videos [here](#).



## Language or Learning Support?

When we wonder whether our children need language and or learning support, it is important that we find professionals who know what it means to grow up with multiple languages and who are accordingly trained.

If your children need support from a psychologist or therapist, it is also advisable that the professional speaks or at least understands the language your child feels comfortable to express emotions in. **Prof. Jean-Marc Dewaele** has done extensive research on this matter and explains the way multilinguals use our languages in therapy sessions (and others), and why it is important to use the language we feel more comfortable with.

With regards to multilinguals and autism, I recommend to watch the interview with **Dr. Shereen Sharaan**, and when it comes to heritage language anxiety, the one with **Dr. Yeşim Sevinç**. Should you have further questions about learning difficulties or disabilities, please don't hesitate to contact me directly. These topics in relation to multilingual children are often very specific and have to be explored individually.

### Silent Period and Selective Mutism

#### Selective mutism is characterized as follows:

- Consistent failure to speak in specific social situations in which there is an expectation for the child to speak, e.g. at school, despite the child speaking in other situations.
- The disturbance interferes with educational or occupational achievement or with social communication.
- The duration of the disturbance lasts at least one month (not limited to the first month of school).
- The failure to speak is not due to a lack of knowledge of, or comfort with, the spoken language required in the social situation.
- The disturbance is not better accounted for by a communication disorder (e.g. childhood-onset fluency disorder) and does not occur exclusively in people with autism spectrum disorders, or psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia.

(source: *Wikipedia* and American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth ed.)*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing. p. 195)

## NAVIGATE

If you fear if your child suffers from selective mutism, it is advisable to seek professional advice.

Your child might have selective mutism if they:

- remain silent for more than 6 months,
- seem “paralyzed” with fear, or “shut down” when expected to speak,
- speak the new language confidently in certain settings but not in others for more than two months, and/or
- seems to experience intense resistance or anxiety when speaking in certain settings,
- use gestures, facial expressions and nodding to communicate (some children with Selective Mutism struggle even with non-verbal communication)

Selective Mutism can look slightly different from child to child.

For more details, please see the **[Teacher's guide to Selective Mutism from Childmind.org](#)**.

### Dyslexia and Multilinguals

When children struggle with reading, many parents fear that they might suffer from dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a "language-based reading disability". Research has shown that people with dyslexia are more likely to have children with dyslexia. And children with one parent with dyslexia are about 40% to 60% likely to be dyslexic themselves.

1 in 10 people around the world are dyslexic, which means that in a class of 20 children it is likely to find two children who have dyslexia related difficulties.

Dyslexia remains often non-diagnosed in multilingual children because people assume that they are simply struggling with the new language.

*To understand what it feels like being dyslexic:* imagine that you are running, and you don't see the hurdles. Dyslexic children need help to find out how to jump over the hurdle they don't see.

**Open Dyslexic** is a font that helps dyslexic people read texts.

## NAVIGATE

### Warning Signs of Dyslexia

If our children have three or more of the following "warning signs" across all their languages, we may consider a thorough evaluation by a professional who will do the testing in all our children's languages. Some of the signs are very common for preschoolers, which makes it difficult for non-professionals to find out whether the issue is temporary and part of the development, or if it is a sign for something else.

Although early identification is best, it is also never too late to be diagnosed and treated.

#### Signs for dyslexia in preschool\*

- A family member with dyslexia
- Chronic ear infections
- Delayed speech
- Learning new words slowly
- Stuttering
- Mixing up the sounds and syllables in long words or mispronouncing familiar words
- Difficulty forming words correctly, such as reversing sounds in words or confusing words that sound alike
- Problems remembering or naming letters, numbers and colours
- Difficulty learning nursery rhymes or playing rhyming games
- Unable to recognize letters in the own name
- Confusion of left versus right

\* The information on this page is taken from the *Mayoclinic* site and [www.TheDyslexiaInitiative.org](http://www.TheDyslexiaInitiative.org)  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dyslexia/symptoms-causes/syc-20353552>

## NAVIGATE

### Signs for dyslexia in school aged children:\*

- Reading well below the expected level of the age
- Slow, choppy, inaccurate reading:
  - can't sound out unknown words
  - makes wild guesses because they can't sound out the word
  - their reading show no connections to the sounds of the letters on the page
  - problems with understanding that words come apart
  - difficulty breaking words into syllables
  - confusion with b, d, p, q, m, w
  - difficulty seeing (and occasionally hearing) similarities and differences in letters and words
- Problems processing and understanding what is heard
- Difficulty finding the right word or forming answers to questions
- Problems remembering the sequence of things
- Inability to sound out the pronunciation of an unfamiliar word
- Difficulty spelling
- Spending an unusually long time completing tasks that involve reading or writing
- Complain about how hard reading is and tends to avoid activities that involve reading
- Struggles with math: memorizing for example multiplication tables, sequences of steps,...

**All these signs can also merely indicate that your child is adjusting to the school language.**

**Multilingual Children with Dyslexia may profit from a Structured Multisensory Approach (Orthon-Gillingham).**

\* The information on this page is taken from the *Mayoclinic* site and [www.TheDyslexiaInitiative.org](http://www.TheDyslexiaInitiative.org)  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dyslexia/symptoms-causes/syc-20353552>



# Language Fluency in Multilinguals

What is *language fluency*?

"Fluency refers to the extent to which someone can speak smoothly and effectively on a range of topics in a language" (ICLS)

Rather than achieving complete accuracy in the use of a language – which is difficult to define – we can think of *fluency* as a *degree of proficiency* in a language.

We achieve language fluency once we can confidently and with the expected or needed accuracy express ourselves in a variety of social settings.

Ute Limacher-Riebold

It is a continuum, not a goal, and it is something that varies over time.

I invite you to read my post on **Fluency in languages** where I also mention the **myth of the native speaker, and David Crystal's opinion about this.**

If you feel uncertain about the use of certain terminology, please watch my video, in which I explain **mothertongue, dominant language, first language, heritage language etc..**

## NAVIGATE

# The Continuum of Language Proficiency in Multilinguals

It is very difficult to compare language skills of multilinguals. It is a continuum that depends on many factors (social settings, contexts, other languages, attitude, etc.)

Language proficiency has been described by Jim Cummins as a continuum that starts from Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and goes to Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Starting from BICS, one reaches CALP after 5-7 years, CALP being the level we need to cope with the academic demands placed upon us in the various subjects.

By distinguishing between **BICS** and **CALP**, as well as **CUP** (Common Underlying Proficiency), Jim Cummins aimed “to equip educators with the understanding and skills required to each, and assess diverse students”\*.

\*Jim Cummins, *Rethinking the Education of Multilingual Learners*, Multilingual Matters, 2021, p. 57

### BICS\*

#### BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

takes 6 months - 2 years

It is about context-bound, face-to-face communication in everyday social interaction, including non-verbal communication, where actions with eyes and hands, instant feedback, cues and clues support verbal language. It involves:

- observing speakers non-verbal behaviour (gesture, facial expressions, eye actions)
- observing others' reactions
- using voice cues such as phrasing, intonations, stress
- observing pictures, concrete objects and other contextual cues
- asking for statements to be repeated/clarified



- This bread is warm.
- Yesterday I met Marc.
- Bring me that glas, so I can pour you some water.
- What did Anna tell you?


## NAVIGATE

### CALP\*

#### COGNITIVE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

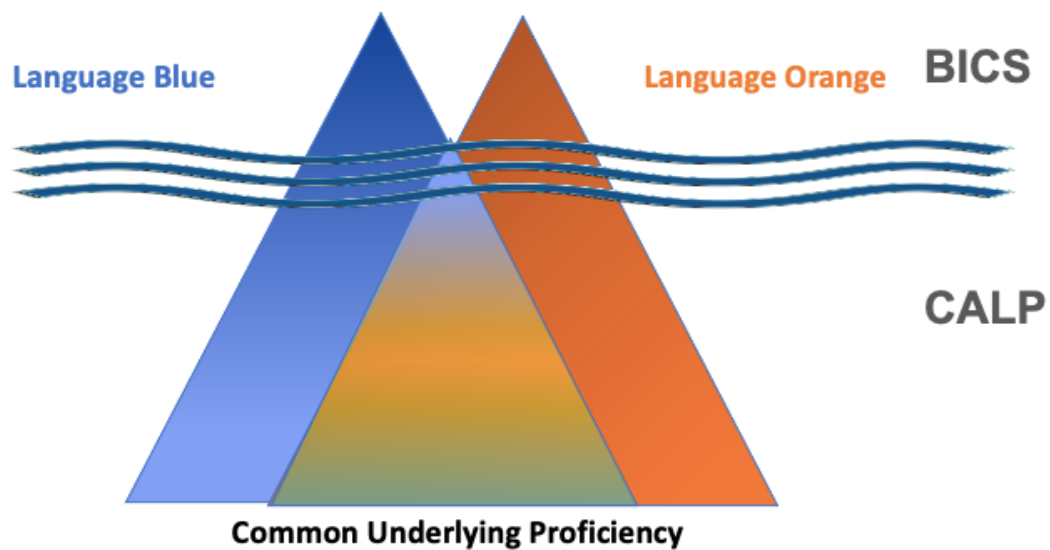
takes 5-7 years

It is about highly abstract, decontextualized communication that takes place in formal, context-reduced, academic situations. This "language of learning" enables children to problem-solve, hypothesize, imagine, reason and project into situations with which they have no personal experience. It means:

- non-verbal cues are absent
  - less face-to-face interaction
  - academic language is often abstract
  - literacy demands are high (narrative and expository text and textbooks are written beyond the language proficiency of the students)
  - cultural/linguistic knowledge is often needed to comprehend fully
- 
- Evaluate the results of this experiment.
  - How did the main character respond to the challenge?
  - What can we conclude from this?
  - Expand on your earlier remarks.



## NAVIGATE



Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible.

Jim Cummins (2000)

Language Orange and any additional language we learn, grow from the foundation of the language Blue and any other already acquired language.

The stronger the "foundation" in the "first" language(s) (language Blue), the stronger the additional languages.

This model applies to **successive multilinguals**, i.e. those who learn an additional language at school.\*

For children who use multiple languages from early on, i.e. **simultaneous multilinguals**, adding languages at school or later in life, becomes easier if they have a solid foundation in them to build on. They can link new terms and concepts with a broader base.

What is most important for our children is that they **develop a solid base of knowledge about the world**, i.e. about as many topics as possible, ideally also through formal instruction.

## NAVIGATE

The **Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP)** represents the set of skills and metalinguistic knowledge that provides the base for the development in both or all the languages.

### CUP\* COMMON UNDERLYING PROFICIENCY

In the course of learning one language a child acquires a set of skills and implicit metalinguistic knowledge that can be drawn upon when working in another language.

**CUP** provides the base for the development of both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) – or any additional language.

It follows that any expansion of CUP that takes place in one language will have a beneficial effect on the other language(s).

This theory also serves to explain why it becomes easier and easier to learn additional languages.



What is the difference between "honesty" and "justice" in the target language?

Can you explain in Language **blue** something you have learned in Language **Yellow**?

## NAVIGATE

Fostering the home language(s) should not happen at the expense of the school language – and vice versa.

Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible.

– Jim Cummins 2000

The emphasis here is on *comprehensible*. Something is comprehensible if we have heard or learned it before, if we have linked it to our knowledge in a way that it makes sense.

A child's second language, or third or fourth language, is dependent in part on the level of competence the child has already in the first language(s).

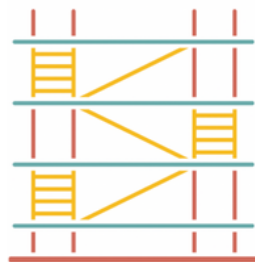
As our children learn most at school, i.e. in the additional language, their knowledge in multiple subject areas can be transferred to the home language too.

About the importance of **comprehensible input** for language learning, I recommend watching the interview with **Prof. Stephen Krashen**.



## Multilinguals and *Language Friendly Schools*

Since children are to be given the opportunity **at school** "to share their full linguistic repertoire in flexible and strategic ways as a tool for cognitive functioning and academic learning" (Jim Cummins), they should be given the opportunity to do the same "for their general learning **at home** and in the community" (Ute Limacher-Riebold).



**Scaffolding** is a process in which teachers model or demonstrate how to solve a problem, and then step back, i.e. offering support only as required, which is based on the theory that when pupils are given the support they need while learning something new, they stand a better chance of using the knowledge independently.

Especially when our home languages are **not** supported at school, or not to the expected extent, we can use **scaffolding** to **bridge between home and school languages**.

I invite you to read my posts about **New school, new routine, new language**, and about **BICS, CALP and CUP**.



## Effective Communication Across Languages – non-verbal communication, intonation and turn taking

We communicate more via non-verbal communication than verbal communication. This renders telephone calls so difficult: we can't see the other person and therefore we can't "read" their body language.

### Non-verbal communication

In multilingual families, non-verbal communication can become even more complex as it can differ considerably across languages and cultures and can lead to misunderstandings as gestures in one language can have different or even opposite meanings in an other.

When using for example the sign "you're smart" in Dutch by pointing and slightly tilting the index finger at our head, it can be misunderstood due to signifying "you are stupid" in other languages. The same goes for the "ok" sign, the "thumbs up" sign and many more.

I invite you to think about the non-verbal signs you use in your language and to explore their meaning in your partner's language, and in the other languages you know.


We often use the same signs across our languages, without being aware of introducing contradicting elements in our conversations.

## NAVIGATE EINSETZEN

### Communication styles in multilingual families

Multilingual families not only switch back and forth between languages, but also between communication styles, wherein non-verbal and verbal communication styles can differ considerably for different languages.

**Non-verbal communication** includes gestures and all other signs we make when speaking our language. When learning a new language, we usually pick up new signs and try to imitate them.

Gestures can differ in meaning across languages, such as, e.g. the "ok" sign  that has an offensive meaning in some cultures/languages.

Same goes for some other signs too...



- **What gestures do you use in your languages at home?**
- **Do your children use them too, and in the same way?**
- **What gestures do they use in their school language?**

## NAVIGATE

- Are there gestures that differ in meaning across your languages and cultures?
- How do you count with fingers in your languages? Do your children count with fingers in the same way as you do?
- How do you use smile in your languages/cultures? Do you use it in the same way across your languages?



Smiling and Cultural Identity  
By Ute Limacher

Please click on the pictures to access my posts about finger counting across languages and the use of smiles across cultures.

Do you notice any differences in using gestures and facial expressions when you use different languages in your family?

We may notice that some family members smile more than others, due to the language or language variety they use, or that there are variations across the languages with respect to the kind of gestures and extent of their usage.

## NAVIGATE

Every language has its own **verbal / oral communication style**. If we analyse the **intonation** or **turn taking**, we might notice substantial differences.

**Have you ever tried to identify a language by the intonation?** Why not make it a game to play with your family: watch some movies or shows on different youtube or TV channels and try to figure out what language is used, based on intonations and sounds.

In multilingual families, chances are high that there is a great variety of intonation patterns.

**Try to recognize the intonation patterns in your family.**



The use of silence across cultures  
By Ute Limacher

Please click on the picture to access my video about the use of silence and turn taking in conversations across cultures, or read my post [here](#).

## NAVIGATE

In multilingual families, we don't only switch between languages, but also between communication styles.

We may combine them, mix them, or feel more comfortable with one particular style and adopt it for other languages.

The way we **take turns** in conversations, the way we accentuate our speech, the intonation and pitches, can vary depending on the language we are using.

- **Which language can you identify by its intonation only?**
- **How do you perceive yourself when using different languages?**
- **How do your children perceive themselves when using different languages?**
- **What kind of turn taking are you most comfortable with?**
- **How do communication styles differ in your family?**

## NAVIGATE

No matter what communication styles we use in our family, we should focus on effective communication, try to avoid misunderstandings, and make sure that the communication flows.

If something your children say in one language sounds odd, try to imagine how the same sentence within the discourse would sound like in the other language(s) your children use: maybe they are transferring the sentence structure, the meaning of a word or the sound of it into the target language. It simply means that they are processing the different languages, trying out what can work in the respective languages, what is grammatically correct and can be understood, and what not.

Transmitting our language to our children not only means to provide them with a rich vocabulary, but also entails that we transmit a considerable variety of ways to structure sentences, use intonations, facial expressions, gestures and body language.



# Effective Communication with Preschool and School Aged Children

## Code-mixing and code-switching

**Multilinguals are not multiple monolinguals in one**, i.e. that all languages are constantly available to be used.

Therefore, all the languages our children are exposed to on a daily or regular basis, and which are used in conversations, are constantly active in their brain and sometimes compete with each other.

This allows them to switch back and forth between the languages, i.e. they are using language Yellow with one person and language Blue with the other, and from early on, they are very good at knowing which language to attribute to which person.

What our children also do, is to **mix** the languages, i.e. they use words from language Blue while speaking language Yellow. The reasons for this can be manifold: our children are still acquiring both languages and simply use a piece that fits, no matter what language this piece belongs to.

When they say "Paola, ich mag die *schiacciata*", they use the word they know best or prefer (here Italian *schiacciata*) instead of the equivalent "(Fladen)Brot", which they might consider unfit in this context.

## NAVIGATE

**Neither code-switching nor code-mixing are signs of the children being confused.**

The opposite is true. When our children code-mix, it is a sign that they have a great command of their languages. It shows how resourceful they are because if they don't know a word in one language, they simply fill the gap by using another language.

I use the metaphor of lego pieces when explaining code-switching and code-mixing.

When we transmit three languages to our children, it is like giving them lego pieces with different shapes in different colours, one colour for each language.

If we ask them to build a house, they will use pieces of all the colors, concentrate on the shape and that the pieces stick properly. They will thus focus on what appears to them the most important, namely the shape of the house. Thus, if we stimulate our children to communicate, they will use all the tools they have at their disposition.

They will use the language based on what they have understood so far, and proceed by trial and error.

If we ask them to build a yellow house, i.e. to speak in one particular language, it can happen that they don't find the matching yellow piece quickly enough and will add a blue one instead.

Our children will still build the house, i.e. communicate though.

And they will try to add a colour, i.e. a word in another language that they know the other person understands!

## NAVIGATE

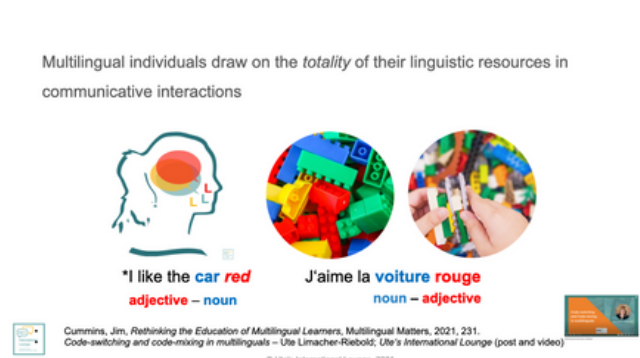
What we can do at that point, is to provide the matching piece by repeating the sentence in a grammatically correct form. Depending on the situation, children might be interested to use the new word straight away.

Using the new word in several other situations and contexts that are interesting for our children and where they are actively involved in the conversation, will also help them memorize the word or concept and use it eventually.

### Important to know:

Children usually only code-mix when they know that the other person can understand all the languages, or that someone is present who can translate, or help them to find the right words.

Multilinguals do not have equal knowledge of all their languages. Language skills are not equally distributed across the languages, because we all acquire and learn our languages with different conversational partners, for different purposes, in different circumstances and to varying extent. Our language skills – understanding, speaking, reading and writing – develop at a varying pace at different levels.



[Here is my video about \*\*Code-mixing and code-switching.\*\*](#)

## NAVIGATE

In conversations with our children, we should rather focus on the flow of the communication.

Try to follow the **20% vs 80%** rule when "correcting" their speech:



enjoy what you hear and what your child is able to share with you for 80% of the time, and think carefully if you want to chime in, and spend 20% of the time (or less) to "correct" the word they use or pronounce in an incorrect way, or model the sentence in the correct way (if your child is receptive for this!).

### **What communication skills can we expect from preschoolers?**

Please always consider that multilingual children might have developed one skill in one language and the other one in the other language.

**Some young preschoolers struggle with telling stories with sequencing events.** Around age 6, children are usually expected to be able to tell events in a chronological order, at least in one of their languages in a way that it is comprehensible to people outside of the family.

Preschoolers like pretend/phantasy play, they begin to understand the connection between sounds and the written word and start recognizing some traffic signs (if they are made aware of their meaning) and other signs in their surroundings.



## NAVIGATE

**Please be aware that the children might prefer playing or speaking in the language(s) they are most exposed to during the day.**

During play or activities where our children use self-talk, they are processing what they have experienced and learned. They try out "roles", voices, terms, that they might not have had the opportunity to experience in class or with their friends.

Pay attention to what they are talking about during these self-talks: it might be that the topics they are talking about are those they need more help with, to become more confident in using the new terms or to figure out how to combine them.

**In these situations we should express acceptance of preschool or school languages at home.**

If the school language is not one of your home languages, after-school activities or playdates in the school language are a great way for our children to experiment with the school language in other contexts, in order to consolidate their knowledge and become more confident.

Alternatively, you can provide these opportunities by allowing them to speak the school language during defined time periods at home, by asking them about what they experienced and learned.

## NAVIGATE

You could ask open questions to allow your child to use the target language in longer sentences, and to elaborate on topics. For example: "Tell me who you played with today", "What did you do together?", "Which story did you like the most?", "What makes you say that?", etc.

**Encourage your children to talk about their feelings, the causes of them and their reactions.**

It is very important for our children to be able to express their feelings verbally, to recognize them and to communicate them in the languages they need.

## NAVIGATE

### Children's communication styles

When we want to optimize communication with our preschool and school aged children, we need to know what kind of communicators they are.

Elaine Weitzman\* distinguishes four communication styles in children.

It is important to keep in mind that our children can use different communication styles depending on the situation, the person they are with, the language they are using or are exposed to in this situation and, of course, their current capability of understanding and using the target language.

#### Children's communication styles depend on:

- their ability to initiate interactions with others
- their ability to respond when other people initiate an interaction with them

**Sociable communication style**

**Reluctant communication style**

**Passive/inactive communication style**

**Own agenda communication style**

\*Elaine Weitzman, *It Takes Two To Talk: A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays*, Toronto, ON, The Hanen Centre, 2017.

## NAVIGATE

### 1) Sociable Communication Style

Children with this communication style **initiate interactions** with others and are quick to respond to others initiating a conversation, even if they use few words or are hard to understand in the target language, which could be an additional language they are just starting to learn.

### 2) Reluctant Communication Style

Children with this style are more likely to respond to others than to initiate an interaction on their own.

They are often considered "shy" and need time to "warm up" in order to become comfortable with new people and/or new environments.

When these children are not given time to adjust and respond, they tend to "fly under the radar" or risk to be labelled as "not fluent in the language", even though they might be much more capable than they appear.

### 3) Passive (or Inactive) Communication Style

This is the communication style of children who rarely respond or initiate interaction with others, which is called passive (*Hanen Institut* and Weitzman 2017) or "inactive".

Children with this communication style seem hard to connect to because they seem uninterested in people and objects.

A developmental delay, a sickness or being on medication, can cause this more "inactive" communication style.

But also children who start attending school in an additional language can have this communication style.

## NAVIGATE

### 4) Own Agenda Communication

Children with this communication style tend to play or sit independently and alone, and will communicate with others only when they need something, or are asked to respond.

It might be difficult to get a message across to these children as they seem immersed in their own world. They might struggle to successfully play and share with others.

Children who are schooled in an additional language that is not one of their home languages, can exhibit the own agenda or a more passive/inactive communication style, when they are not yet fluent enough in the daycare/school language.

It is advisable for parents to explain the language situation to teachers and to invite them to find other ways to interact with the children.

#### **What communication style best describes your child *most of the time*?**

If your child uses an *Inactive*, *Reluctant* or *Own Agenda* communication style, it might be helpful to involve them more in interactions and ask teachers to help with making the child feel more confident and comfortable using the target language.

*All children benefit from parent's efforts to make interactions more successful, interesting and fun.*

*Find out how to optimize the communication with your children to support their way to communicate with others in the most effective way. In our Toolbox for Multilingual Families you may find some ideas.*

## NAVIGATE

"From a very early age children make conceptually sensitive linguistic choices that draw on a developing knowledge of their separate language systems, switching languages depending on their interlocutor.

The sociolinguistic situation contributes significantly to the language use of bilingual\* children, indicating that language mixing requires a high degree of language awareness and competence rather than reflecting a deficiency in linguistic knowledge"

(Helen Grech and Barbara Dodd, *Assessment of Speech and Language Skills in Bilingual Children: A Holistic Approach*, in *Stem-, Spreek- en Taalpathologie*, vol.15, Nijmegen University Press, 2006)

\*Ute: and multilingual children

## NAVIGATE



### Foster early literacy

It is important that **preschool children** start learning about the connection between the spoken word and the written word. When we make reading with our children a habit, it will be easier for them to get interested in reading. I share some activities and games in a playlist on the youtube channel [Activities for Multilingual Families](#).

### School aged children

When our children start attending school, they usually are able to communicate, i.e. to use language in a way to make themselves understood by others.

Especially when the school language is an additional one to those you use at home, I recommend to spending one-on-one time with your children every day to find out what they are learning, what words they are needing to learn and become more confident using, not only in their **school language** but also their **home languages**. Please note down topics and words in all their languages on the next two pages\*.

\*I suggest you print out the next two pages to keep track of what your children learned over a longer period of time.

**NAVIGATE**

# **IN THE SCHOOL LANGUAGE**



**WHAT OUR CHILDREN LEARNED THIS WEEK:**

**NEW WORDS/TERMS IN THE SCHOOL LANGUAGE:**

**BOOKS READ THIS WEEK:**

**NAVIGATE**

# IN THE HOME LANGUAGE



**WHAT OUR CHILDREN LEARNED THIS WEEK:**

**NEW WORDS/TERMS IN THE SCHOOL LANGUAGE:**

**BOOKS READ THIS WEEK:**

## NAVIGATE



Take note of similarities and differences in your children's use of words, terms, expressions, etc. in their different languages.

As school aged children are spending more and more time with peers, we have to go to greater length to connect with them.

Focus more on your children's interests and ways of doing and saying things.

Use conversations to help your children process what they experienced and to formulate their thoughts.

Help them set goals (e.g. "After school we will have a snack before going to the scouts") and solve problems (e.g. "As you didn't have a good day with A. today, let's arrange a playdate soon").

**When our children spend most of their time immersed in another language, they might need some time before being able to switch to the home language(s).**

***Time and Place*** strategies might help to set clear signs for when to switch languages.\*

**Which time is most suitable for you and your child to use your home languages?**

\* with *Time and Place* I refer to one of the **Family Language Strategies**.

## NAVIGATE



### Taking time

You don't need to dedicate hours at end every day to help your child, neither with your home language nor with the school language. This is not realistic.

It is more important that if you make time to spend one on one with your children, to fully focus on the conversation in the target language.

Try to avoid any distraction and enjoy the moments you spend with your children.

If you are on a tight schedule: what about *scheduling* the one on one time with your children? Does it sound strange?

We tend to schedule meetings with our colleagues and give them our full attention, so why not also do the same with our children.

In this manner they will get our undivided attention in a safe and non-judgmental setting.

If you have questions about this strategy, please don't hesitate to contact me or to ask in the [facebook group](#).



## NAVIGATE

### Parent's roles when communicating with children

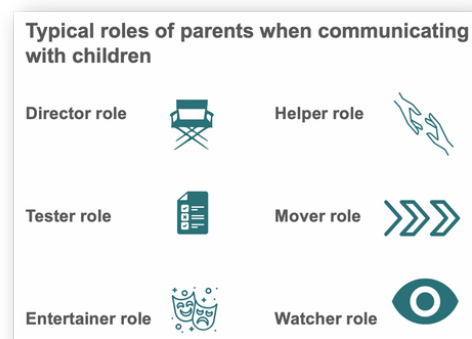
When speaking multiple languages, we mix the different communication styles or develop a multilingual style that mixes gestures from one language with the intonation of another.

We usually combine them unconsciously, but what is interesting to observe is that most gestures, as well as intonations and turn taking patterns, are acquired naturally by our children.

Please observe how you communicate, and how you switch from one kind of communication style to another when switching languages.

When communicating with our children, we play "roles" that are influenced by our personality, our idea about parenting, our very own communication style, the way we manage challenges with everyday situations and our children's communication styles.

Please find out what roles\* you play more frequently, and how you could adjust them in order to optimize the communication with your child by **reading my post about it.**



\*Elaine Weitzman, *It Takes Two To Talk: A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays*, Toronto, ON, The Hanen Centre, 2017, p.25-27.

JOIN



## (Re)defining your Multilingual Village

We need a multilingual village  
to raise a multilingual child.

(adapted from an African saying)

Ute Limacher-Riebold PhD



When our children are between 4 to 10 years old, we usually have found "our village".

You have probably already found people who support you and your family with your languages. You will also have noticed that as situations change, our support group can change too.

In the previous chapters you have re-determined or confirmed the languages you and your children need. I now invite you to have a closer look at your village and find out if the people in your village still are on the same page, if they have the same interests, values and if they share your views on raising children and their language development, since we need people who are not judgmental towards languages and the language use of our children.

These observations might lead to your village becoming smaller, which should however not be seen as an issue.

If you are raising your children as a single parent, please read my post where I give some tips:



**Single parents can raise a bi/multilingual child**

## JOIN

Find out *who* in your multilingual village is:



- **ready to support your language regularly**  
(it doesn't need to be daily, but weekly would probably also meet your needs; the support can be through different means of communication such as face-to-face, video calls, phone calls, emails and text messages)
- **motivated to support your children with age appropriate input**
- **motivated to access a variety of resources**

To find the "right" people, consider those who know your child best, know about their interests, their skills, not only language skills, and what they are passionate about – provided that your child is fond of them.



It would be ideal to find one or two persons per language who can provide regular quality input for our children.

This means that the language they use, the stories they tell and the experience they share, are compelling for our children.

An *Ersatz*-aunt, a nanny, babysitters or au-pairs are what many multilingual families living abroad resort to due to not having family living nearby.

Video calls will become valuable for older children on top of in person conversations.

When you are the only one who provides input in your language to your child, it should be only a temporary solution, and you ought to look for further speakers of your language. Since finding such language speakers can be time-consuming and might prove difficult for moving internationals, I invite you to contact my facebook group **Multilingual Families** to find like-minded families in the place you are moving to.

The older our children get, the more will their social environment impact their overall development.

Having people around who support us with our languages and our cultures on a regular basis, will help us in the long run.

**Raising children with multiple languages, means to raise them with multiple cultures, a variety of habits, traditions, values and beliefs.**

## JOIN



Furthermore, we want our children to be able to communicate with peers and adults, and, eventually to be able to function and be confident using their languages in a variety of social settings. Choosing people who transmit a specific language with different accents, using different registers\* and talking about different topics, will benefit and broaden our children's understanding and use of that language.

Not everyone who supports us in the beginning will stay with us throughout the journey. This applies to all domains of life.

Keeping a healthy and harmonious connection with people who are important for our children, means to adjust to the needs of everyone involved whilst making sure the communication flows.

As mentioned earlier: *choose your battles wisely* and don't let language become a reason for a dispute or a power struggle.

After determining our multilingual village for our family, we may want to find out how our languages are supported in the meso-society, e.g. preschool and school.

No matter if you choose a bilingual school or not, you may want to choose one attended also by other multilingual children, one that supports your languages and that allows your children to speak your home languages on the school premisses.

\*We all use different registers (formal, informal, etc.) when using language in different circumstances.

JOIN



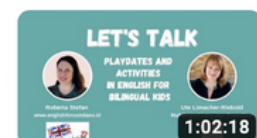
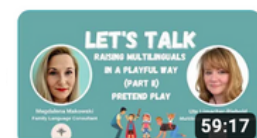
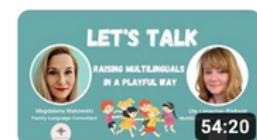
For our 4 to 10 year-old children it becomes more and more important to connect and have effective, successful and enriching communication in their languages.

We need people from **different age groups** and with **a variety of interests**, that can provide input about **different topics**, and possibly use different registers (formal and informal).

What about activity classes in your home languages outside of home?

What about starting one if there aren't any in your language (yet)?

Get inspired by what **Chryssa, Kat, Magdalena** and **Roberta** are doing in Denmark, the UK, Germany and Italy.



JOIN



## Accents and Multilingual Listening Skills

Having an accent when you know and use two or more languages is a fact of life; it doesn't make you any less bilingual, and it rarely impedes communication. It is something bilinguals get used to, as do others they interact with.

– François Grosjean, *Bilingual. Life and Reality*, 2010, p. 84.

When our children attend school in a language that we don't speak at home, we obviously want them to receive the best language input possible, and we tend to think that only native speakers can provide this.

**Native speakers as teachers are not a guarantee for quality.**

**Native speakerism**, or the linguistic prejudice related with the "ideology in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), is based on the assumption that native speakers of English are better at English and therefore are better teachers than nonnative teachers of English"\* **is overrated.**

\*Lim, D., Park, E.S. Facts and Fictions of Native Speakerism: Local EFL Teachers' Experiences and Viewpoints. *English Teaching & Learning* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-022-00128-3>

## JOIN

### The advantages of non-native speaking teachers:

- they are accomplished language learners
- they have actively studied the grammar and vocabulary
- they are more likely to rather focus on personality, not nationality
- they emphasize more with the students who learn the school language as additional language
- they have a broader metalinguistic awareness across multiple languages

The teaching environment plays a fundamental role for the teacher and the students.

Therefore, instead of focusing on the language-nativeness of the teacher, it is advisable to look at their education:

- Are they trained to teach children with a diverse cultural and linguistic background?
- Did they learn another language to a high level of proficiency?

Please read **Prof. Jean-Marc Dewaele's** study about teachers and **my post** about this topic:

"The more confident teachers are in the subject they are teaching, the better the class environment for the student and the teacher, and the better the outcome."



Native Teachers or Non-Native Teachers – that's NOT the question!  
by Ute Limacher

– Jean-Marc Dewaele, Pearl Leung (2022)

# JOIN

## Accents

We all have accents. Every region in the world has its own accent, i.e. the way words are pronounced, the intonation of them, the pitches.

### Accents in your languages:

- What accents do use and recognize in your family, in your country, in your language?
- Which accents do you like or prefer in your languages?
- What accents do you dislike and for what reason?

*Having a somewhat "native-like" accent makes us more understood by a greater variety of people who speak the language and adds prestige to our language performance.*

*We want our children to **speak like a native**, to not stand out. Children can distinguish between accents, and interestingly are able to identify the more standardized sounding ones!*

We all know people who acquired or learned another language later in life and who speak it without discernible accent.

If we can not provide more standardized versions of the target language, or if we want more respective input for our children for whatever reason, we can use audiobooks, recordings, movies, etc., to transmit a variety of more standardized sounding input.

## JOIN

There is **no relationship** between one's language proficiency and having an accent or not.

"Researchers do not agree on an accent age limit – no accent if a language is acquired below it, the presence of an accent if it is acquired later.

Some have proposed that a language can be "accentless" in the sense of not being influenced by one's first language if acquired before age six, other extend the window to age twelve..."

– François Grosjean\*



(Click on the image to access the article).

François Grosjean, (2022, January 7). Bilinguals and Accents, Psychology today  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/life-bilingual/201101/bilinguals-and-accents>

## JOIN

### The advantage of multilingual listening skills

Fact is, that children who grow up with multiple languages and a variety of accents and variants, are much less biased when it comes to accents.

Multilinguals who are exposed to a greater variety of accents in the respective languages have a better understanding of a broad range of ways to pronounce words and convey thoughts.

This is a great asset in an international setting, because they don't categorize their peers and later colleagues based on their accents in the different languages, and they won't be distracted by *how* they sound, but rather focus on *what* they say.

**The importance of developing multilingual listening skills.**



**Do you have multilingual listening skills?**





## Multilingual Siblings' Language Use

When we raise more than one child with multiple languages, we may observe that they use the languages in different ways.

How can we help them to use their languages in the most effective way?

What language or languages do they use among them?

The language preference of multilingual siblings can have a profound impact on the family.

Especially when they opt for the local or community language, or when they prefer one of the parents' language, which can easily make the other parent feel excluded.

"Each child gets more or less out of a situation, even if the family shares the same experience" – Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert *Bilingual Siblings: Language Use in Families*

One child might pick up more vocabulary and understanding for the language out of the same context, whereas the other needs more exposure and input, or is less receptive for it.

**Everyone has different preferences when it comes to languages and we can't do much about it.**

## JOIN

### **Should we have a more relaxed approach when using our languages?**

Each child learns their languages – like all kinds of skills – at their own pace. Furthermore, children from different age groups might be in different stages of language development.

The advantage of siblings is that the older ones can help the younger ones develop their language skills, even in multiple languages.

Sometimes older children use child directed speech or baby talk with their younger siblings. It can also happen that the younger siblings speaking the home language encourage the older ones to maintain it.

In the same way it can happen that the language skills of one sibling intimidates the other one who is not at the same level of language development, especially when it is the younger one that seems to be more fluent.

There are many reasons for our children to become frustrated about their language competence, wherein each child reacts differently, and each child deserves tailored help in such a case.

### **What can we do to make using our language easier for all our children?**

Children usually have different communication styles, characters and preferences. Especially when they use several languages, it is more difficult for them to limit their engagement to one language. Code-mixing and code-switching is thus common in multilingual families.

## JOIN

The most effective way to help our children to use our home languages also among them throughout the different phases of their language development, is by making the target language appealing and enjoyable for them.

**How can you make your language more interesting and enticing for your children?** (list some ideas here and, if you want, share them in the facebook group).

"The same way parents try to manage the language use in their family. they should invite their children to manage their language use among themselves."

– Ute Limacher-Riebold

Observe the language use of your children when they are in a conversation among them:

**What language do your children speak among them?**

**When do they switch to their home languages?**

If this applies: **Does/Would it bother you if they don't speak your language with each other?**



## Multilingual Identity

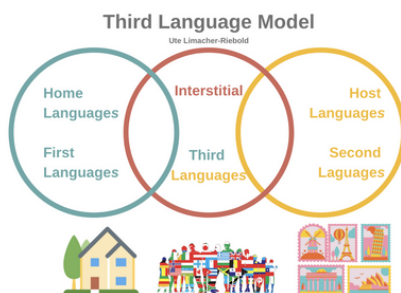
The way our children experience their languages, how they use them and their individual accents, are part of our children's identity.

We can always reactivate a dormant language later in life if we learned it to a certain extent earlier on, but it always does require some energy and dedication.

This is why I always recommend to foster the home languages, at least in some way. We don't want our children to lose a language that has been important for them at some point of their life, especially in case of a family or heritage language.

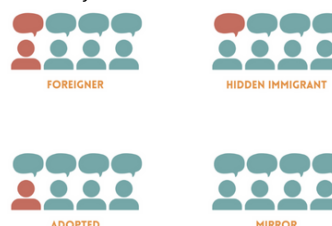
People who have suppressed one of their more important languages or have experienced language loss, do regret to having not been able to keep it somehow "alive". We so not want our children to experience this.

Please read my posts about the **Third Language Model** and the **Language Identity Model** (or listen to the audio-files on the sites).



©Ute Limacher-Riebold 2021

Language Identity Model  
by Ute Limacher-Riebold



## JOIN

Do multilinguals  
have multiple personalities?



Having multiple  
personalities is a disorder.  
Being multilingual is not.  
– Ute Limacher-Riebold

A person who speaks multiple languages identifies with the different respective cultures related to the languages, and *acts* in different ways, i.e. seems to behave differently, adopts intonations of the other languages, the pace and their typical expressions.

Multilinguals are better at adjusting their way of communicating to the situation, the language (and register) and the people they speak with.

Multilinguals have access to multiple cultural reference systems, which is important due to personality and identity being constituted by many elements, facets.

“In a world where more and more people grow up and live with various cultural references – even more so after the expansion of the internet – it is meaningless to stick to the monistic concept of identity. Identity can be multiple, it can be plural” – Tokuhamas-Espinosa 2003\*

\*Tokuhamas-Espinosa, T. (2003), The multilingual mind: Issues discussed by, for, and about people living with many languages, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, p.185.

## JOIN

### Does being part of multiple cultures cause an identity crisis?

Some multilinguals experience an identity crisis due to the different cultures, which is however often caused by other people implicitly or explicitly expecting them to choose one of the cultures.

Since according to Charlotte Burck\*, identity can always be “actively constructed and renegotiated”, then identity and personality have dynamic aspects. They evolve and develop throughout our lives.

When we speak different languages, we express different aspects of ourselves. Our different languages allow us to express several facets of ourselves and the way we perceive and experience the world, but this does not change our personality.

**Multilinguals feel a difference when switching between the languages, whose cause is most probably the mere change of the frame of reference triggered by the change of language.**

"What is seen as a change in personality is most probably simply a shift in attitudes and behaviours that correspond to a shift in situation or context, independent of language."

–François Grosjean, *Life as a Bilingual: the reality of living with two or more languages*, Psychology Today, 2011.

\**Multilingual living: Explorations of language and subjectivity*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

## JOIN

The typically two to four dominant languages of a multilingual vary over one's lifetime.

"All our languages are present (retrievable) for us all the time, and they form our very own multi-competent multilingual identity." – Ute Limacher-Riebold 2022; Guest Lecture at RUG

Please take the time to watch the interview with **Prof. Li Wei** **about the Multi-Competence in Multilinguals.**

**What is your experience as a multilingual or parent of a multilingual child with respect to identity?**

# ORGANIZE



## Similarities between Languages

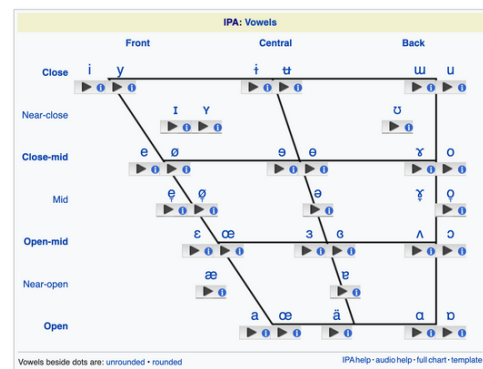
The way we approach learning new languages determines the outcome. When we focus on the similarities between the languages we already know and the additional one, we lower the inhibition threshold.

Language proximity can facilitate this first step and make understanding easier. The proximity or similarity can be related to the sounds, the intonations, some words, concepts, expressions, the syntax structure, etc., as well as gestures.

The advantage of children who grow up with multiple language is that they already have a broader base of language patterns to link the new language too.

## Exploring sounds

Exploring sounds is a very easy way to start.



## ORGANIZE

You can also explore the **loanwords** in your languages, which are words that entered the vocabulary at some point in the past.

French words that entered for example the English vocabulary in the Middle English Period (1100-1500) in different domains:

- *Nobility*: baron, baroness, count, countess, duke, duchess, marquis, marquess, prince, princess, viscount, viscountess, noble, royal, etc.
- *Culture/art*: art, bracelet, clarinet, dance, diamond, fashion, jewel, painting, pendant, satin, sculpture, etc.
- *Law*: attorney, chancellor, country, court, crime, evidence, government, judge, jury, noble, etc.
- *Church*: abbot, chaplain, chapter, clergy, prayer, priest, religion, sacrament, saint, sermon, etc.
- *Cooking*: beef, boil, butcher, dine, fry, mutton, pork, poultry, roast, salmon, etc.
- other terms: adventure, change, chart, courage, dignity, fruit, letter, literature, magic, male, female, mirror, etc.

**What loanwords from *other* languages can you find in your home languages?**

## ORGANIZE

**Which words are similar across your home languages?**

(like Ball (German), ball (English), ball (Dutch))

**Which loanwords from other languages are you aware of in the community or school language?**

## ORGANIZE

### Sayings and proverbs across your languages

You have probably noticed that sayings and proverbs can differ across languages, even though there can also be very similar ones.

#### **What sayings do you use regularly in your language(s)?**

e.g. "nützt es nichts, so schadet es nichts" (German) for "no use, no harm"; "in bocca al lupo" (Italian) "Hals und Beinbruch" (German) for "break a leg"

## ORGANIZE

Have a look at **Pieter Bruegel de Elder's** painting about **Dutch Proverbs** to find out if there is any proverb that sounds familiar.



Image of Public Domain in the US, Netherlands and other countries (CDSM-directive)

## ORGANIZE



## Learning to Read for Multilinguals

Raising children with multiple languages might require the parents to provide them access to the written word in languages that are not taught at school.

Many parents wonder how they will be able to keep up with all the languages and how to make sure to foster them all in a more or less balanced way.

Our expectations tend to grow with our children. While we were happy and proud during the first years that they could differentiate and use the various languages and make themselves understood by others, at some point we want them to be interested in reading and writing these languages – if our languages are not dialects, since the latter ones usually are not available in written form.

If we have made reading in our languages with our children a habit from early on, their access to texts and their interest to become readers in our languages will be easier. But as every child differs, some will become avid readers, whereas others become more reluctant ones.

## ORGANIZE

### Should we start teaching our children to read and write in the home languages?

Understanding and speaking happens more naturally than reading, which requires formal instruction. It takes several years for a person to become a *skilled reader*, i.e. someone who reads to learn.

If parents want their children to be able to read and write in their home languages, they have to be ready to put some effort into it.

#### When is my child ready to learn how to read in my language?

"Every child develops differently. Some children are more eager and ready than others to jump into literacy. If your child is ready and willing, it's fine to start teaching her or him to read and write in the non-school language before the start of formal schooling."

– Janice Nakamura *Habilnet*; Learning how to read and write in two languages

Find out if your **preschool children** are ready:

- do they follow your finger when you read with them, maybe ask questions about the respective word on the page?
- do they recognize letters or characters when out and about, on signs, posters, etc.?
- do they make attempts to decode words?

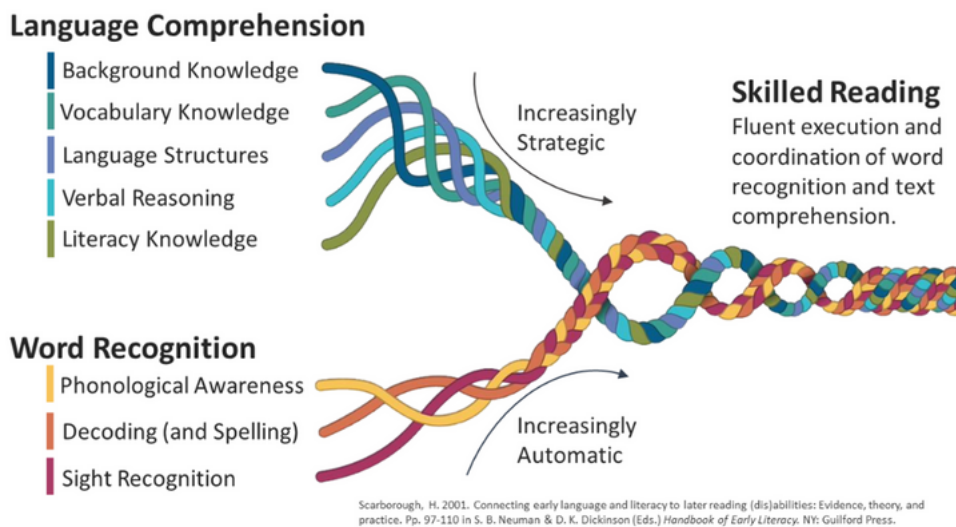
If you can respond with yes to all the questions, your child is likely to be ready to be taught how to read.

## ORGANIZE

### How far do we want to go with teaching our children to read in our languages?

To answer this question we need to be aware of what teaching to read entails.

### The Reading Rope (H. Scarborough)



The Reading Rope consists of two strands: the **Language Comprehension** strand and the **Word Recognition** strand.

What you find in the **Language Comprehension** strand encompasses the knowledge anyway provided by any parent to their children from early on.

**Background Knowledge** is what our children understand about the world, what they can relate to, like that the apple is an edible fruit, that the rain is water and can be cold or warm, that there is day and night and that there are several days of the week. It also includes our different cultures, the traditions, the beliefs and the values our children grow up with. It embraces all their languages and cultures.

## ORGANIZE

**Vocabulary Knowledge** means the words and their meaning, including the variety of meanings they can have. A rich and various vocabulary is a prerequisite for our children to understand the written word, and to make this connection between what they know and what they read.

When our children grow up with several languages, it is important that they know the terms and concepts in their languages in order to anchor them to the written word.

As mentioned before, the language our children are exposed to at school will be their most dominant one, the one in which they will make substantial progress within a relatively short time, as they need to function in it.

As the home language vocabulary will not expand as quickly and possibly won't cover all the topics our children learn at school, they might not be able to access texts in our home language to discover those terms and the "world" of reference that would provide them with this vocabulary.

Therefore, it is advisable to also expose our children to these topics also at home, especially if we want our children to also be able to understand and read texts in our home languages.

## ORGANIZE

**Language Structure** refers to the syntax, the way sentences are formed in the language. For example, in English we say "I like the dog", in German "Ich mag den Hund", in Italian "Mi piace il cane", which follows the same SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) structure.

When adding an adjective however, the sentences in German and English follow the same structure – "Ich mag den blauen Teppich" and "I like the blue carpet" – whereas in Italian the structure changes, as the adjective follows the noun in "Mi piace il tappeto blu".

Language Structure also refers to the many meanings words and texts can have, such as that a *group of fish* is called *school*, but also the place where our children are taught.

And it refers to morphology, i.e. that in English the plural form of a noun is usually formed by adding a trailing –s.

Our multilingual children learn to differentiate between the syntax structures of their first languages by trial and error. This code-mixing is perfectly normal and a necessary part of the learning process as it is a way to connect the different systems. Our children don't need to learn every new language from scratch: they can build on what they already know.

By reading to and with our children we expose them to a variety of different ways to say things, to different styles – formal and informal speech, direct and indirect speech, etc., which helps to compensate the possibly lagging exposure compared to other speakers of our languages.

## ORGANIZE

This is one of the many reasons why reading to and with our children is so important, especially when we transmit our language whilst living abroad.

**Through books, our children not only access the world but also our cultural world of reference through a broader variety of language.**

**Verbal Reasoning** refers to understanding when and how words are used, when they are meant in a figurative and literal way respectively.

Our children need to understand what is said and how it is said. The verbal reasoning skill can be fostered through conversations, speech, or through texts.

Our children need to learn that there are multiple ways to express thoughts and meanings. They need to understand that meanings can be implied, such as when they want to go outside to play and we say "it is going to rain", they are supposed to wear a raincoat or wellies.

The same goes for understanding metaphors, sayings, sarcasm and jokes.

Verbal reasoning skills can be fostered for example by encouraging our children to tell stories, to do role plays and enact scenes.

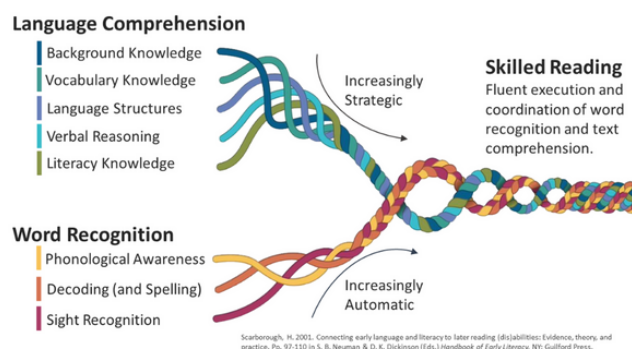
## ORGANIZE

**Literacy knowledge** refers to different genres of texts: news, articles in newspapers, poems, riddles, fiction, non-fiction, dialogues, comics, etc.

The broader our children's literacy knowledge, the better they can understand the texts as each genre has its own rules with regard to the use of vocabulary and the different styles.

The more our children learn about each of their languages for all these aspects, the better they will be able to understand the texts in those languages.

The **Language Comprehension** strands are strongly entangled. They feed and reinforce each other to form a complex unity that weaves together with the **Word Recognition** strands.



The **Word Recognition** strands are part of the pre- and early literacy skills our children can acquire.

Word Recognition is what teachers focus on when teaching our children how to read in formal settings.

## ORGANIZE

**Phonological Awareness** is the ability to understand that words are made up of sounds.

Children learn to speak without being told what a word is and where a word or sentence ends. They imitate speech and for some time will consider a chain of words to be one word.

When they learn more about the language and how the different parts of a sentence can be used in other contexts and orders, they start to understand that these parts of speech can be used like tools to build meaning (and sentences). When they learn to read, they recognize that the sounds they articulate, correspond to the words they can decode on the page.

Children who grow up with multiple languages have a broader repertoire of phonemes\* and of sounds they can use to render what they say.

Learning to read a language requires to not only to recognize the sounds, but also to discriminate the individual sounds, e.g. by rhyming, blending, segmenting and manipulating speech sounds. This awareness can be built by recognizing that words can be broken down into different **sounds** and **syllables**:

d-o-g



rain-bow



\*Phonemes are the smallest units of sound that distinguishes one word from another in a particular language.

## ORGANIZE

A playful and effective way to raise phonological awareness are rhyming activities and games, such as words that rhyme – either with the first letter or sound, or the word ending – possibly across the languages our children know, e.g. resulting in combining rhyme words like German *Kuh* and *Schuh* with English *flew* or *glue*.

When our children blend sounds into syllables and syllables into words, or they learn how words are built, what elements can be moved, changed and what impact it has on the word.

Other suitable activities are therefore those which involve words to be manipulated to change their meaning, such as playing with how compound words are formed across the children's languages.



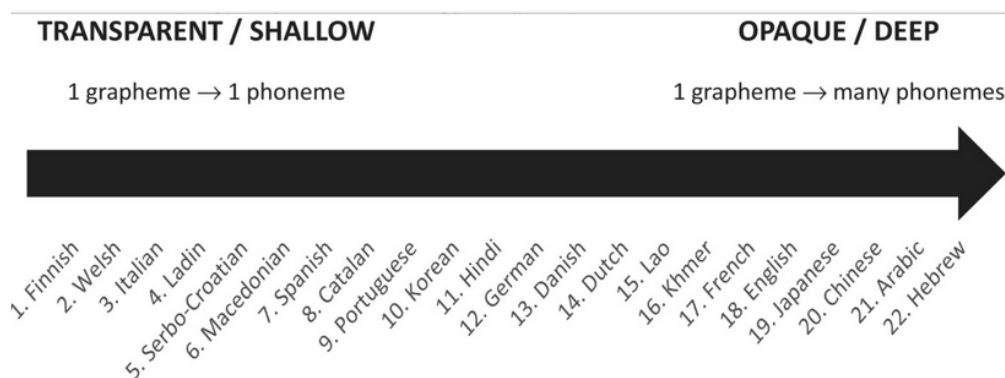
When segmenting words, they will quickly understand that in English a trailing –s is added to a noun to form the plural form (e.g. "car" and "cars"), and they might try to apply this rule to another one of their languages, thus resulting (in case of Italian) in referring to a group of children as *bambinos* instead of *bambini*.

## ORGANIZE

**Decoding** is what we do when we start reading, namely by sounding out the letters one by one: C-A-T, and it involves focusing among others on phonics, on blending letters and learn about silent letters and more.

Being proficient in decoding means that we can sound out correctly all the words from a written text even though we might not know what they mean.

Teaching our children how to decode words is easy for words with simple correspondence between letters and sounds, but when it comes to more complex sound combinations, more knowledge about the rules applicable to the respective language is required.



Orthographic transparency across some languages in the world (adapted from Liu & Cao, [2016](#) and Perfetti & Dunlap, [2008](#)).

If your home language is a **transparent language**, i.e. the sound and letter correspondence is clear and there are not many rules, teaching your child to read your language will be easier than if the language has many ways to pronounce a sound chain, as for example the many ways one can pronounce <ough> in English:

[ʌf] in rough, /aʊ/ in plough, /u:/ in through, /oʊ/ in though, /ɔ:/ in thought, /ə/ – in thorough /θʌr. ə/, /ɒf/ in cough, /ʌp/ in hiccough and /ɒk/ in lough.

## ORGANIZE

### Sight words

The sight recognition of words refers to words we recognize instantly, automatically, effortlessly, without sounding them out or guessing them.

We usually start with words that start with a letter we know, and once we recognize them easily and use them more frequently, we don't need to "read" them, but recognize their pattern.

It takes time and a lot of practice and repetition to reach that stage.

When teaching our children to read in our home languages, they need to practice all these skills.

We don't have to do this all by ourselves though. We can foster for example the **language comprehension** skills by exposing our children to a rich and varied language, and supporting them in recognizing new words in an enjoyable way.

#### My tips:

- **Start with short and easy words and let the child take the lead.**
- **If you teach your child to read in your home languages, please inform the teacher about what you are doing and the resources you use.**

## ORGANIZE

If your children are already learning how to read in the school language and they show signs that they are ready to learn to read in their home languages too, they probably have already acquired most or all of the skills necessary to decode text.

Try to find texts in your home language that have topics similar to the ones they currently deal with at school to optimize the transfer between the languages and the memorization of new words.

Some of the activities and games suggested in the *Toolbox for Multilingual Families* can help you foster your children's reading and writing skills in their home languages.



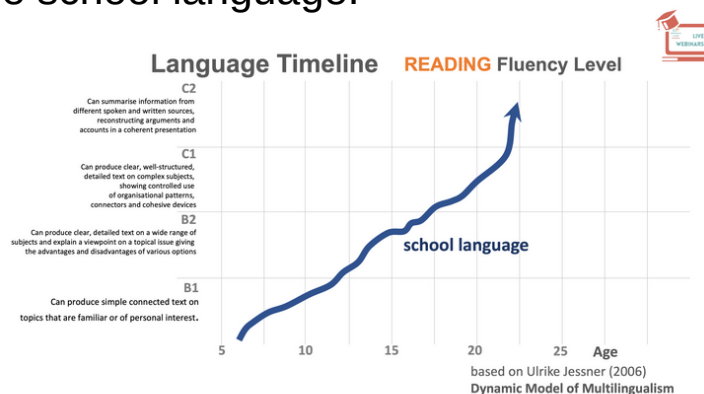
# ORGANIZE



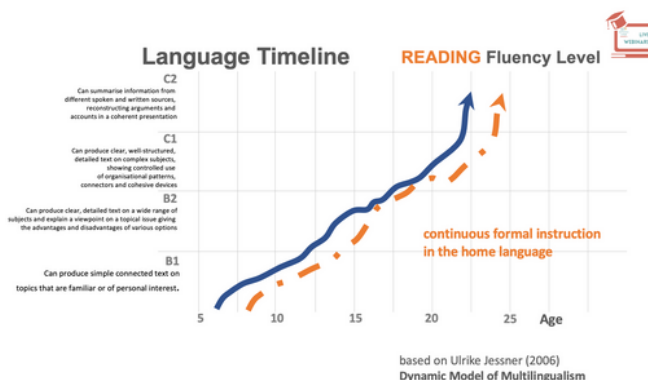
## Multilingual Children's Pluriliteracy

Due to the amount of exposure to the school language, our children are likely to develop literacy skills in the school language with more consistency and at a relatively high pace, independently of at which age and in which setting learning started.

The following graphic indicates the expected language development in the school language with regards to the overall capacity of functioning in the school language.

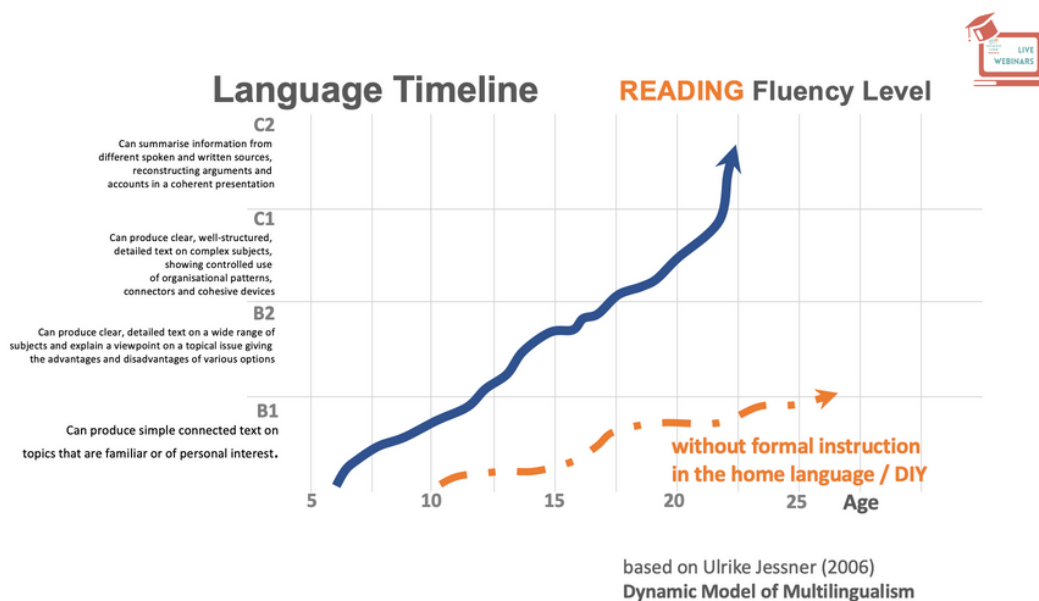


The next graphic shows the **ideal situation**, where the home language (Orange) develops alongside the school language, i.e. when children receive **continuous formal instruction in the home language and the school language**, preferably in some subject-areas that do not only encompass language lessons.



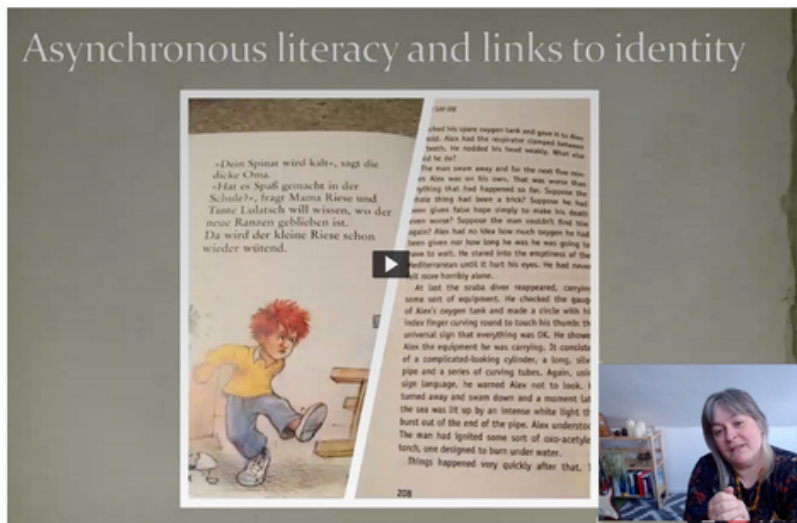
# ORGANIZE

When our home languages are not part of the school curriculum or are not fostered with consistency at home, children might not reach a high level of proficiency in the language. Improving their literacy skills in that language will thus require an additional effort.



## ORGANIZE

# Asynchronous literacy



Dr. Sabine Little

[multilingualism-in-schools.net/rivers-of-reading](http://multilingualism-in-schools.net/rivers-of-reading)

It is very common for children whose home languages are not supported in formal settings to develop an **asynchronous literacy**, which means that their reading skills in the home language are lagging behind those in the school language. In the above picture, Dr. Sabine Little exemplifies the discrepancy between what a nine year old child is able to read in the home and school language respectively in case of the home language not being supported at school.

"Biliteracy\* development is influenced through context, content, and media, as part of the fluid relationship between bilingualism and literacy."

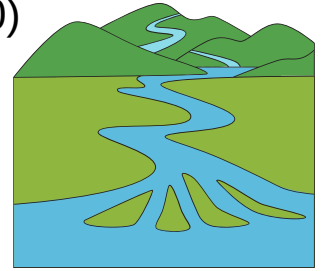
N.H. Hornberger 2004\*\*

\*or pluriliteracy

\*\*Hornberger, N. H. 2004. "The Continua of Biliteracy and the Bilingual Educator: Educational Linguistics in Practice." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 7 (2-3): 155–171.

# ORGANIZE

The ***Rivers of Reading*** (Gabrielle Cliff Hodges 2010) is a creative way to reflect on the children's reading journey by collating representations of their favourite books and memories they associate with them.



## My "River of Reading"

Think about all your reading experiences, across your whole life, back as early as you can remember. Did somebody read to you when you were little? Did you have a favourite book, or story? Or one that you loved? What language was it in? Check with people older than you to help you remember, and begin to put together your "River of Reading." It is your river, so you make the rules - here are just some ideas!

Think about your reading over time - what was read to you, and what you read yourself. It does not just have to be books! Magazines, online text, subtitles, everything counts, but you don't have to include everything you "read." Try to pick key books (or stories, or texts) that are important to you. You decide what's important. It might be that a book is your favourite, or it might be one about the book, and more about who read it with you (or to you), and how it made you feel. It might be a book you disliked so much that you still remember it. It might be a book that was a special gift, or the first time you read an author who became a favourite. It might be the first book or story you managed to read all by yourself, or something you read on an amazing holiday. It might be a book that helped you get through a holiday, or a book recommended by a teacher.

If you speak more than one language, please, do include books and stories in languages other than English - it would be amazing to see these, and we would love to hear about your reading (or being read to) experiences in other languages, and for you to show off your amazing language skills! Are there books you are proud to have read in a language other than English, or you wish you could in English, or you could recommend them as a friend? Or have you read a book originally written in English, but you read it in another language? Or books in a language other than English get read more at certain times of year (at home you see family members)? Do you read equally much (or little) in all the languages you speak?

It might help to think about big events in your life - starting school or moving house for example. Some of you might have moved between countries.

Once you have chosen your books (or stories, or texts), decide how to share them. Here are some ideas:

- Write and draw on pieces of paper - you can stick different bits of paper together to make your river longer, or just start a new page. If you have a printer, you can print and cut out book covers, or you can draw them (or anything else you want to!).
- Create a PowerPoint or other electronic format - you can search for images online, and insert them into your work, or you can take photos of books you have, and insert them that way.
- Use a long paper roll (e.g. wallpaper) to create your river, and make your books into postcards on both.
- Come up with our own way to create and celebrate your River of Reading!

Whatever you do, think about "why" you are including books (stories/texts). You might want to add little notes to your books, or you might even video yourself introducing your whole River of Reading. Grown-ups can help you remember, and they can help create, but you are in control of your River of Reading! About all, have fun!

Unit 10 | www.makingpalms-in-schools.net

Please download your copy of the ***Rivers of Reading* handout [here](#).**

You can start River of Reading for your children by pointing out books you had read to them when they were small and had particularly enjoyed them, and then let them continue the activity by adding books they want on their "river".

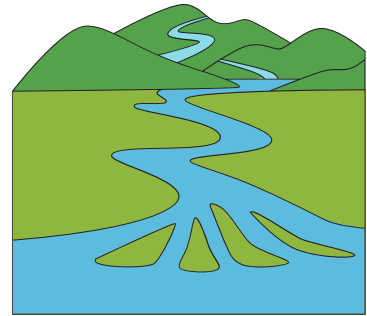
This activity can help to negotiate reading habits. You can for example invite your children to read a book in your home language that is similar to a book they read at school. If your children are not that fluent readers yet, start with looking at books that emergent readers would read, such as books that are known to be read first in the school language.

If you have questions about how to implement this activity, or any other activity with your children, [I am happy to help you.](#)

## ORGANIZE

Our multilingual children's literacy is linked to their self perception, their home language identity and the school language identity.

“Rivers are fluid, they change like children’s reading is different. We all hope they become strong and confident readers”  
– Cliff Hodges 2010



## How can we help our children to find the "right" books?

Cloze Test



Reversed Cloze Test



We can use the so-called **reversed Cloze Test** by opening a random page of the book, let your child read the page, let them underline or write on a paper the words they don't understand, and see if they can still grasp the meaning from the context.

If the number of words they do not understand, either directly or thanks to the context, amounts to more than about 20% of the text on the page, the book might not be suitable for them. If in doubt, repeat the same procedure on a few other random pages of the book.

## ORGANIZE

When choosing a book for your children, make sure that they:

- like the style of the book
- are familiar with the topic of the book
- are interested in the topic of the book

Other criteria to find the right book for your children:

- choose a book they loved to read several times, but translated in your language
- let them choose whether to *read* or *listen* to the book in your language

**What are criteria *you* find important when choosing a book for your children?**

## ORGANIZE

### Weekend schools in the target language

Weekend schools are for many families an attractive option to foster their children's pluriliteracy.

When choosing a weekend school, make sure that it provides the support you are looking for.

Here are a few questions you might ask yourself beforehand:

- **What language fluency do children need to attain in the target language, and in what time frame?**
- **Does the weekend school provide recognized certificates in the language?**
- **Will children attain CEFR level B2 or C1 at the end of the curriculum?**
- **Does the curriculum of the school meet your expectations?**
- **Is your child motivated to attend a weekend school?**

Please watch the [interview with Chryssa Oikonomidou](#) about what home language teachers do.

## ORGANIZE

If you are planning to move to a country where your home language is the majority language, and you want to prepare your children for the transition, make sure to find schools that have transition programs that will smooth for your children the change from the previous school system and language to the next one, especially if you plan to send your children to a local school.

Many international families decide to choose one specific language for their children's education to make it easier for them to change schools during their international assignments.

It is advisable for many reasons to stick to one school language and curriculum. The older the children get, the more difficult it will become to switch school languages.

If you have specific questions about international moves with multilingual children, please **contact me directly**.

YES



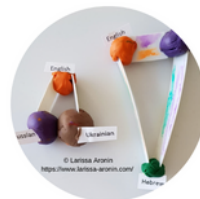
## Language Timeline and Portrait

I invite you to choose one activity to do with your children in order to celebrate your languages.

### Language Portrait



### Dominant Language Constellation



### Language Timeline



Please follow the [description of the activities](#).

Please share the activity you did in the [private facebook group](#) or send it to me via email: **AcademyUIL@gmail.com**

# YES

Take the time to go through what you have learned and implemented so far, and make sure to answer all the questions asked in this workbook.

You are always welcome to ask me questions either in my facebook group or **by email**.

You can also always schedule a one-on-one **consultation with me**.

**Last but not least, I invite you to set three attainable, i.e. realistic language related goals you intend to implement in the next three months**


## YES

After completion of the course and this workbook, I suggest you to wait 60 days before assessing **what went well, what you liked and enjoyed** and **what does not work for you and your family**.

### WHAT WENT WELL

### WHAT I LIKED / ENJOYED

### WHAT DOES NOT WORK FOR ME / US

## YES

It is important to set a few realistic language goals for your children and to regularly check if they were attained, what helped and what should be changed.

Raising children with multiple languages (and cultures) is a journey that never stops and that changes constantly. This can make it challenging at times, but also exciting.

Although the course and workbook ends here, I invite you to share your experience with me – I am always curious and eager to learn from other families' experiences, as they can be helpful for other families like yours and mine.

## Some resources



Please contact me if you are looking for resources in specific languages and/or language combinations, or ask other parents in my facebook group **Multilingual Families**.

# THANK YOU

If you would like me to help you with setting up your very personal *S.M.A.R.T. Family Language Plan*®, please book a consultation with me.



**ENJOY** all your languages!

Warm regards,

*Ute*

