

Workbook

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

for parents of 0-4 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 0 to 4 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 and ESL Language Instructor and Speech and Language Specialist.

Bridging 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 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 teenage children who are multilingual too.

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

I designed the **E.N.J.O.Y. program**© in 2014 and it has proven to be very successful for several hundreds of internationals.

ENJOY is not only one of my favorite words, 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 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: where we **yield success**.

The process doesn't end with the last step. With the tools this program offers, you will be able to come back to each step whenever necessary, to update and adapt them throughout time.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This *Workbook* is part of the course *E.N.J.O.Y. Raising children with multiple languages for parents of 0-4 year old children**. It is recommended that you use this workbook in its digital version, as you can fill it in on your device (preferably computer or tablet), and access resources through the links or QR codes. You are, of course, free to print some pages for your personal use only, if you prefer filling in the blanks on paper.

While following the different videos, you will be asked to complete parts of the workbook, answer questions and do specific tasks, as well as 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 once you have watched all the videos and/ or read the whole book.

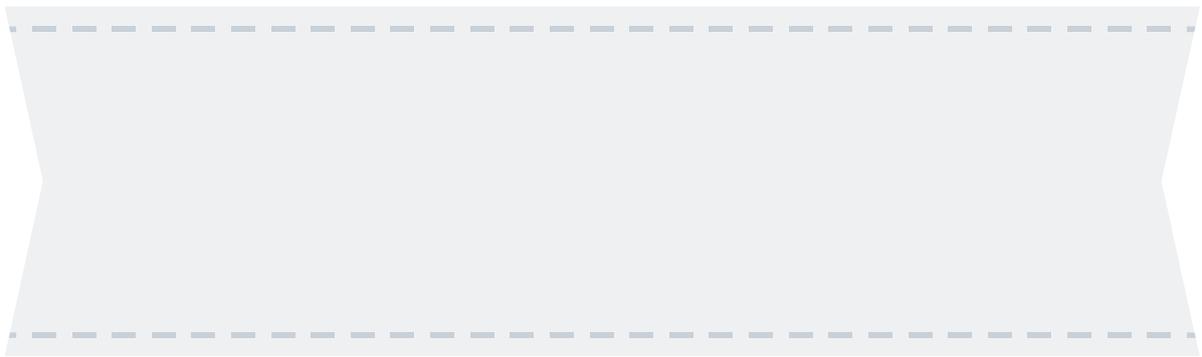
Should you need any help with completing the workbook, or if you would like to discuss parts of it, please ask in the private facebook group Academy *Ute's International Lounge Academy*, or contact me directly at *academyUIL@gmail.com* with the subject "Q:Raising multilinguals (1)".

I hope you enjoy starting your multilingual journey with the help of this book and the videos I prepared for you.



*<https://academy.utesinternationallounge.com>

*This workbook
belongs to*



ENTER WELL



Please watch these two videos first

When raising children with multiple languages, it is good to know that we are embarking on a long journey that is subjected to changes that require modifications and adaptations, and that entails situations that we might not have considered at the beginning.

As for every journey, it is advisable to be prepared. Answering some basic questions allows us to set a foundation of our children's and our own life with multiple languages:

- 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. Each family has a unique language constellation that deserves an individual solution, tailored to the family at a particular moment of their journey.

Every multilingual family is unique in its language constellation and use, and there are many ways to transmit and foster home and community languages.

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* usually defines 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, a community, in 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, and 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 – although 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 and one or more 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

Raising children with multiple languages starts at home, with us parents, as we are the first persons who communicate with them. I invite you to think about your own experience with acquiring and learning languages, because **our own experience can have an impact on how we transmit the languages to our children.**

What languages did you acquire and learn, and when?

Where did you acquire/learn your languages?

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

How did you acquire or learn them?

With your parents, a nanny, grandparents, teachers...

ENTER WELL

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

What worked for you?

(reading comics, listening to audio material etc.)

What didn't work for you?

(what would you do differently now)

ENTER WELL

How well do you know your languages?

Language Skills Checklist*

This list is not exhaustive. Feel free to expand it.

Speaking

- I can sing lullabies, nursery songs and I know rhymes
- I can express my feelings and emotions
- I feel comfortable having an everyday conversation
- I am comfortable having a conversation on the phone
- I understand and can tell jokes
- I can talk about family anecdotes
- I can give compliments and comfort
- I can have an adult conversation

Reading

- I can recognize some letters and words
- I have learned the written code of that language
- I can read short words
- I can read a chapter book
- I can read articles
- I can read a novel
- I can read an official email/letter
- I can read a variety of texts confidently

Writing

- I can form letters and numbers correctly
- I can write words
- I can write short sentences
- I can write a short text
- I can write a longer (informal) text
- I can write an official email/letter
- I can write a longer (formal) text
- I can write a variety of texts confidently.

*This checklist is similar to the one included in *The Toolbox for Multilingual Families Workbook*, by Ana Elisa Miranda and Ute Limacher-Riebold, 2021.

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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Languages in **society**

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.



- 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



How **accepting** and **welcoming** is the society you live in towards your language(s) and culture(s)?

How **supportive** is your community towards your **languages**?

Do you **understand/speak the community language**?

The degree of acceptance and understanding we perceive from our environment has an impact on our attitudes towards our own language(s) within our family.
– Ute Limacher-Riebold

ENTER WELL



Languages in the **family**

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

How **supportive** can you be with the other **languages**?

Do you **understand/speak** your partner's language(s)?

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

– Ute Limacher-Riebold

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 great influence on how our children perceive their heritage languages and cultures.

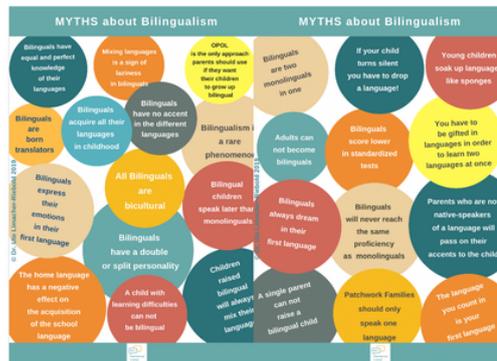
The more accepting and inclusive we are towards all the languages and dialects in our family, the better. Parents can create a safe environment where each language is valued and fostered.

We don't necessarily have the power to influence our community or society, therefore a healthy and supportive environment at home is the best start we can offer 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 respect to how welcoming it is towards your culture and your language or dialect. Some languages are perceived as more prestigious, others are considered as "not important enough". Make sure that your home languages are equally valued and supported, as if you were living in all the countries your languages come from at once!

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 – not only 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, misunderstandings and come from a place of fear.

We all are 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 helps to develop coping mechanisms and to be ready to respond in the best possible way.

The better we are prepared and *know what we are doing*, the better.

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 they are just looking at the situation from another perspective: try to find out which one.

ENTER WELL

My advice in these situations is to **assess the situation** to understand whether *walking away* is maybe 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 this. The use of "why" always evokes a defense reaction in the other person and it will not help the 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 effective communication.

If we ask "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 then can 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 and us, the language and the culture!

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

NAVIGATE



Finding the right language to speak with our children and the strategy that allows us to foster all our languages, can seem daunting, and many parents feel that it is like steering a boat whilst not knowing exactly how and when to use which of the available tools.

Let's start with the "right equipment", namely the languages we already speak as parents.

As multilingual parents, we usually speak more than one language to various levels of fluency and proficiency. We might be able to express our emotions and feelings spontaneously in more than one language. We might even be very proficient in up to three or four languages!

Although this is a great advantage in a globalized world, it doesn't make it easier to decide what language to speak as the **main language** or **primary** language with our children.

If you are in doubt about what language to choose as the main or primary language, I invite you to take the quiz on the next page.

Please be aware that language preferences and the languages we use can change and shift over time!

 [Language Shift](#)



NAVIGATE

Before you decide what **main language** to speak with your children, answer 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 answer at least one of the questions with NO, you may want to **practice the language and gather resources to become more confident** in the language, or you **choose another one of your languages** for which you can tick all the boxes.

If you hesitate speaking the language, or feel the need to constantly look up words, opt for another language as the **main/primary language to speak with your child!**

Remember: You can always add another language later!

NAVIGATE

The main or primary language you speak with your children should stay the same throughout your life.

The language we choose is the one with which we establish the important (vital!) emotional bond with our children, therefore the decision should not be taken lightly!

If you are speaking a language with your child that you are not so confident in, in which you can't express yourself spontaneously, and are wondering how to make the shift to a language that would allow you to be more spontaneous, I am happy to help you find the most healthy way for you and your child to make this transition.

In any case, it is always better to never have to make such a transition in the first place.

You should therefore be very conscious about what language you choose and consider also long term goals: will you be happy if your child speaks that language with you in 10, 20, 30 etc., years?

If you wish me to help you with deciding, you can always book a (free) consultation with me.





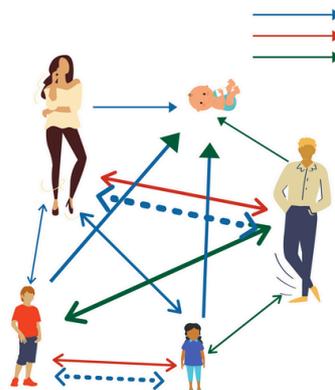
Family Language Plan

A family can be considered as a team, with every member contributing with specific skills to make the collaboration and mutual support work in the most effective way for everyone.

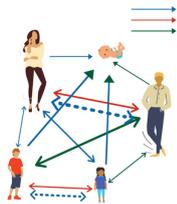
Every team that works on a project shares the same goal and defines the steps that each member needs to take to achieve it. When our children are very young, we still don't know how they are going to respond to everything, to life in general, us, parents, the daily environment and the languages they are exposed to.

As young parents we can define the long term goals and think about the small steps in the first years, with which we can and want to support our children.

Try to answer the questions on the next pages and come back to them every few months to monitor changes.



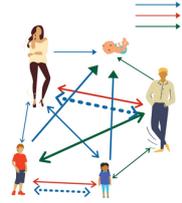
NAVIGATE



A goal without a plan is just a wish
– Antoine de St. Exupéry

- What languages do your children **need** to speak?
- What are the **expectations in terms of fluency** (be able to understand, speak, read, write – at some point)?
- Are the **language goals realistic**, i.e. are achievable in the given time frame and with the available resources?

NAVIGATE



Describe your Family Language Situation

- **Who speaks what language with whom, and when?**

- **How much exposure of what kind** can you offer to your child in each language?

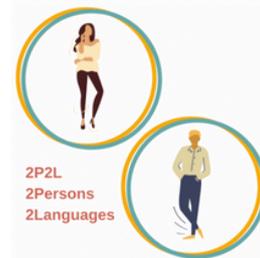
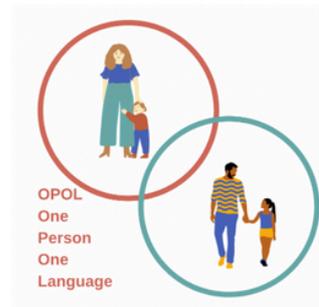
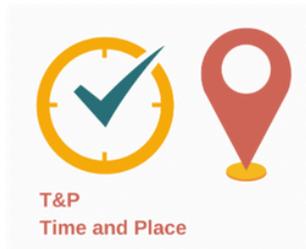
- What is the **daycare/school/community language?**

Set three language goals for the next months:

—
—
—



Family Language Strategies



Family Language Strategies are guidelines for our family language setup, which help us to find out when to use what language with whom.

Once your language goals are aligned with the situation, you can find out what Family Language Strategy or what combination of strategies suits your family.

The aim of the **Family Language Strategy** is always to **maximize the exposure** to each of the languages our children need to acquire and learn.

When deciding about the strategy, we need to consider our children's **needs, capacities and interests.**

NAVIGATE

There are countless scenarios of multilingual families that can be placed on a **continuum of increasing complexity**.

There are families who speak one language at home and one in the community, and there are families who speak two or more languages at home and two or more in the community.

For labelling the languages, I prefer using colors instead of labels like "Language One" or L1/2, mother tongue, La/b or Alpha/beta, to avoid any kind of language hierarchy.

Scenarios of multilingual families = continuum of increasing complexity



Language scenarios in multilingual families

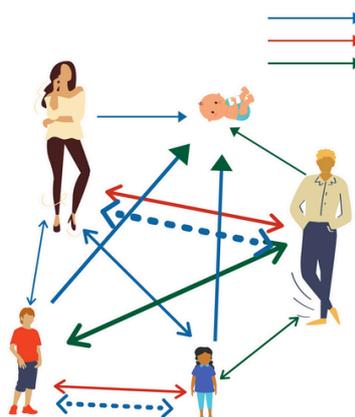
NAVIGATE

- **Who** speaks **what** language **with whom** (when at home | with extended family | friends | community | and in other situations)?

Please trace the languages you use in your family and "outside home" with the help of the illustration on the next page (if in doubt, rewatch the *video* of the course).

In the picture here below, the mother speaks the blue language and the father the green language with all the children, the parents speak language red between them and occasionally (hence the dotted line) the blue language etc.

The arrows towards the baby only go in one direction as the baby doesn't respond yet verbally.



There is no one-size-fits-all, but many ways to do it right!



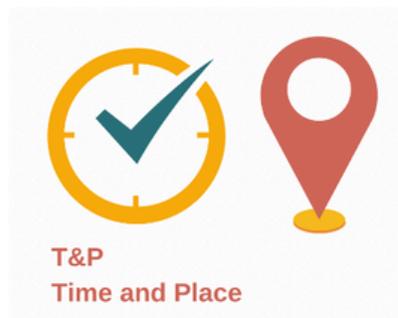
(at home)



(outside home)



NAVIGATE



 Please watch the video *Family Language Strategies* carefully as well as my "other" video on the same topic.

The questions asked so far, give you an idea about what strategy or strategies might work for your family.

What makes it all more complex, is the fact that we all use languages in our very own way, in different contexts and for different purposes.

Furthermore, we cannot foresee how our child will develop and respond to the language he or she is exposed to.



As the language input in each language varies, depending on who provides it and in what context, it is very unlikely that we can provide a balanced and equal input in each of the languages our children need.

Furthermore, our children are not like "sponges", although our youngest ones tend to **absorb everything**. This has to do with the infant brain being able to absorb a considerable amount of information from the environment effortlessly, continuously and indiscriminately, because it is, what Maria Montessori calls an "absorbent mind".

From birth to the age of about three years, children use all their senses – hands, eyes, ears, nose, tongue etc. – to explore everything that surrounds them. They do this **naturally**, **unconsciously** and without **choice**. Maria Montessori refers to this period as the **unconscious creation**. Based on what children absorb from the surroundings in the early years, they construct their self.

This remarkable ability to absorb information allows them to acquire language in the most natural way, hone physical skills (like controlling their hands, imitate gestures, feed themselves, walk etc.), and gain control over their bodily functions.

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All these skills are necessary for their future independence.

Around age 3 children move from the state of this unconscious absorbent mind to the conscious one, which means that they begin to **intentionally direct** and **focus their attention** based on experiences which have been created during these first three years.

During this conscious absorption phase (when they are between 3-6 years old) children develop intellectually and their minds sort through what they hear and experience, and make sense of the information they have absorbed unconsciously so far.

During the first three years of life, **about 90% of the brain development occurs**. This means that during this critical time, infants should be exposed to as much interaction, contact, stimulation and love as possible.

In order to help our children to use what they absorb in the first three years by ensuring that the pathways built in their brains are consolidated, we need to provide **serve and return** opportunities, namely **meaningful** and **effective interactions** with our children.



Brain Development and the Role of Experience in the Early Years, Adrienne L. Tierney, Charles A. Nelson, Zero Three, 2009, November 1 (30(2), 9-13.

NAVIGATE

Despite the young brain being so fast in developing: if there is no stimulation, pathways will be pruned.

This means that the most successful and most used connections are kept and the others are progressively pruned.

“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*.

Neural 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.

This decline does **not** mean that we are not able to learn later of course.

To understand more about 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.](#)

What does this mean for our children's language development?

It means that if our three year old children are exposed to five languages from birth but are only prompted to interact in three of them, the neural paths in the latter three will be consolidated.

What they acquired in the other two languages will still be there and they might be rather receptive users of them, i.e. understand them, maybe respond to some extent, and they will be able to build from there should they need and want to do so at a later stage.

Studies about this topic with adopted children show that these children remembered the language of their caregivers before being adopted as toddlers.

The same also applies to other skills we learned earlier in life: if we stop using them for a while, once we restart using them again we'll improve quicker than if we were to learning them from scratch.

As with muscle memory, the more we were training our muscles the first time, the quicker we will be able to master new movements – or any skill – later. Therefore, the more intense and active the exposure to a language early in life, the easier it will be to "reactivate" it later.

NAVIGATE

Nevertheless, we need to be careful when using the image of the *sponge*, since around age 3 our children will start deciding what is important, what they need and what not.

Therefore, if a language is important for our children, for our family, we need to provide a language rich environment for them, which means to create interactive moments of effective non-verbal and verbal communication, so that through experience key systems are built and later outcomes are shaped.

The **serve and return** interactions play a fundamental role in language acquisition (see: [Serve and Return interaction shapes brain circuitry](#)).

On the next page you will find an infographic about the **10 stages of bilingual (or multilingual) language development** for simultaneous bi/multilinguals, i.e. for children who are exposed to multiple languages from birth (or in the first phases of life), based on studies and research on this topic.

The mentioned age groups are purely indicative for when these stages are more likely to occur.

Please be aware that every child develops in her or his very own way and at an individual pace!

Every child develops at his/her very own pace!

10 STAGES OF BILINGUAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

UtesInternationalLounge.com

During the first stages of bilingual language acquisition, also known as **undifferentiated stage**, the child experiences both or all the languages as one single language system and they are the same processes a monolingual child goes through.

The following **10 stages** describe the **bilingual language development** of a **simultaneous bilingual**, i.e. a child that acquires both or all languages from birth and before the age of 3 (or before formal instruction).

AGE*



STAGE



Birth - 2/6 months

Cooing
(production of single syllable, vowel-like sounds)

6-12 months

Babbling in syllables
(repetitive consonant-vowel utterances)

12 months

Comprehension of many words and phrases in each of the 2 languages
First Words (monosyllables)

soon after 12 months

Production of what sounds like single words in one or two languages

18-24 months

Noticeable increase in the number of different words produced

around 24 months

Production of a combination of 2 word sentences

30-36 months

Production of short sentences with at least some bound morphemes

around 42 months

The child is mostly understandable to unfamiliar adults who speak the same language

around 48 months

Production of complex sentences

54-60 months



Ability to tell a short story and uses compound sentences with words such as "and", "but", "or", "so", "because" etc.

* The age range is purely indicative of when events are likely to occur.

This infographic is ©Ute's International Lounge, 2019.

It is based on: Annick De Houwer, *Bilingual first language acquisition*, Bristol, Multilingual Matters, 2009.



NAVIGATE

This means to continuously comment on what we do, to verbalize our actions, share information about new objects, topics etc.

The sooner we get used to accompany what our child can see and experience by talking, the better.

Child directed speech is a very powerful way to engage in non-verbal and verbal communication with our children. By exaggerating gestures and intonations in a way that is compelling for our children, we help them to focus on the interaction, teach them about turn taking and transmit to them not only the art of communicating, but we also connect with them on an emotional level, which is essential for their healthy development.

Infants and toddlers (and some preschool children) don't have a sense of time, which means that talking about something that will happen in the future, seems as vague as talking about something that happened a while ago. They can thus not situate or anchor the situation with respect to the time when it occurred. Talking about what we did right now is easier for them to comprehend than talking about what we did Tuesday at 3pm.

For the same reasons, we should make sure to reference objects and experiences they know, instead of too abstract or new ones. Let yourself guide by your child: what does your child observe, enjoy, what is he/she fascinated about?

Look at the world through the eyes of the children and explore the surroundings with them.

NAVIGATE

Language Development in Multilinguals

Children who grow up with multiple languages undergo the same language development as their monolingual peers, but in each of their languages!

As the language input varies across the languages they acquire, because every person responsible for a given language provides a particular input, there can be variation in the development in each language, even if the children are exposed to each language on a regular basis.

Our children **acquire** their languages naturally, by listening to what they hear and by being involved in **serve and return** interactions, while they connect with us and communicate non-verbally and verbally.

Some studies emphasize "the earlier the better", which is based on the critical period hypothesis, that seems to coincide with what Maria Montessori describes as the unconscious mind period. Fact is, that we can acquire and learn additional languages at any point of our life.

When it comes to speech development, speech and language therapists advise to do a lot of talking *with* the child – as opposed to *to* the child.

NAVIGATE

Preverbal skills are very important in language and communication. I invite you to listen to the podcast with [raisinglittletalkers](#) and [peds.doc.talk](#)

I always encourage parents to follow their children's lead. Our children communicate to us what they are interested in by cooing, waving, babbling, later by using monosyllables and increasingly longer words and sentences.

Try to adjust your pace to your child's.

If we get used to talk *with* our child from day one on and treat them as *talkers*, the communication will flow.

Talking with our children means to lean in, use child directed speech, adjust our pace to theirs, follow their interests and respond to their needs.

Once our children start becoming verbal, we can help them to get more confident by repeating new words over and over again (in nursery rhymes, songs etc.) and in a variety of contexts.

If our child is discovering fruits and starts saying "orange" (it might sound more like *ange* or *oan*), we can invite our partner to share occasionally the very word in his or her language too, thus making sure the child understands the connection object/fruit-word.

NAVIGATE

Once our children start speaking, we might become impatient and shower our children with many new words and contexts.

Our children need to hear and experience words many times before they will use them. They need to find out how the language works, and in order to do that, they need to try, fail, try again, fail again, many many times until they get it right.

It is the same as with learning to walk, or learning any other challenging skill for that matter.

A very effective practice that the *Hanen Centre** recommends to parents with children who have language delay, and that works brilliantly with all children, is the **OWL**, which stands for **Observe**, **Wait** and **Listen**.

The advice is to observe our children, wait for them to connect and communicate with us, and to listen, whether they are cooing, babbling, using gestures, words or sentences. Because our children will respond when they are ready, using their means of communication and when they feel encouraged to communicate more.

Observe
Wait
Listen™



*Elaine Weitzman, *It Takes Two To Talk*, A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays, The Hanen Program, 2017.

Language Development in Multilinguals



Research shows that bi/multilingual children know approximately the same number of words as monolingual children. Their total lexical knowledge embraces the vocabulary across all the languages the child is exposed to on a regular basis. Therefore a bi/multilingual child does not automatically have language delay.* Furthermore, when considering the vocabulary size of our children, we should always consider all the languages they are using and are addressed in.*

When we are asked, what and how many words our children are using, we tend to mention less than those they actually are able to articulate, because we assume that only "correctly articulated" words count. When counting the words children actively use, it is important to know what to count and what *not* to count.

What to count

- Words used purposefully to communicate: to make requests, label, comment, protest, ask and answer questions...
- Words that are shortened: *ba* for *banana*, *uh* for *up* ...
- Exclamatory words and animal sounds or *onomatopoeia*: *moo*, *baah*, *ouch!*, *vroom!*
- Words learned as a chunk: "I did", "I love you", "what's that?", "good morning" etc., count as single word, *if each word in the phrase is not used independently.*

*Annick De Houwer, *Bilingual Development in Childhood*, 2021, p.18-21

NAVIGATE

Not to count**

- Words that are an immediate imitation: not demonstrating that the word can be used purposefully or independently
- Words that are used once and never again: not demonstrating the word is used consistently (most of the time) when the opportunity arises
- Memorized lyrics learned as a chunk: when children don't necessarily understand or use individual words; when they do not use the words purposefully to communicate in another context
- Counting or alphabet: when children just memorize the sequence but don't necessarily understand what the numbers or letters represent; when the word is not used purposefully to communicate.



I invite you to watch the video about [Language delay and multilinguals](#).

**I thank SLP Melissa from @RaisingLittleTalkers (IG) for these lists!

NAVIGATE

Possible questions/tasks to be asked when your children are around 2 years old*

- Does your child understand simple tasks?
(put your jacket on, close the door)
- Can your child name or point at different body parts?
(where is your nose?)
- Does your child articulate 5 to 10 words?***
- Does your child understand 3 word sentences?
(on blue table, in the garden)
- Can your child combine two words like “mama cup” or “look dog”?**
- Can your child make 3 word sentences?***
(Anna in bed; papa in car)
- Can your child put 3 to 5 words in a row?
(Anna want blue cup)
- Is half of what your child says understandable by others?
- Can your child repeat short stories with the help of pictures?
- Can you understand three quarters of what your child says?
- Does your child also make longer sentences?
(I like to play with Marc when...)
- Can others understand your child without any problems?

*This list is a combination of questions found on several sites. Please find out what questions / tasks are usually asked in the place you live, and with regard to the different languages.

**The words can be pronounced in a simplified way. Usually you would be able to understand what your child means.

**Observe your child's language development
across all her/his languages!**

NAVIGATE

How much does your child understand?

- Does your child **understand the language**? *It is about receptive language: can your child follow simple directions, respond to their name when called, point to pictures when named, identify body parts etc.*
- How does your child **use gestures**?
Children may use gestures instead of words to communicate.
- How many **new words** does your child add to their **active vocabulary** each month?
- **Can you understand** what your child says/means?
- Does your child have any **difficulties at daycare**?
*Socializing, understanding**
- How does your child use **non-verbal communication** to **socialize** with others?

*If your child is still adjusting to the daycare, communication difficulties can be related to the daycare language and or the new situation.
Find out how you and the teachers can ease the adjustment.

Bi-/multilingual children are NOT more likely to have difficulties with language, or to show delays in learning, or to be diagnosed with language disorder.

Paradis J., Genesee F., Crago MB, *Dual language development and disorders*, Baltimore, Paul Brookes Publishing Company 2010

Code-mixing and code-switching



Multilinguals are not multiple monolinguals in one, which means 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.

From early on, children 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 use a piece that fits, no matter what language this piece belongs to.

When they say "Papi, ich will *schiacciata*", they use the word they know best or prefer (here Italian *schiacciata*) instead of the equivalent "(Fladen)Brot", which in this context might not fit for them.

NAVIGATE

Neither code-switching nor code-mixing are signs of confusion.

The opposite is true. When our children code-mix, it is a sign that they have a great command 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 how this works. When we transmit three languages to our children, it is like giving them lego pieces with different shapes in different colors, one color 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 is important: the shape of the house. Translating this metaphor, this means that 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, aka, communicate though.

And they will only add a color, i.e. a word in another language that they know can be understood by the other person!

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, the children might be interested to use the new word straight away. Alternatively or additionally repeating the new word in several other situations and contexts that are interesting for our children and where they are actively involved – e.g. when we sing with them or tell them a story – will help them memorize the word or concept and, one day use it eventually.

Important to know:

Children will 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 or balanced 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 and in different circumstances, and to varying extent. Our language skills – understanding, speaking, reading and writing – develop at a varying pace at different levels.

Multilingual individuals draw on the *totality* of their linguistic resources in communicative interactions



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

"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 [and multilingual] 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)

NAVIGATE

Language use and development can be influenced by *change*

When your child is experiencing change, some factors can affect his or her language **use** and **performance**. During these phases, it is sometimes necessary to **adjust the family language strategy** for example by including a person to provide input in a language that needs more support.

Whenever changes happen in the family, there might be:

- less time to dedicate to the child
- less exposure in the target language
- a shift in the child's language use

Possible reasons:

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



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 for example gestures, e.g. when our children raise their arms to be picked up, or when they point at things they want to have.

All the signs we make when speaking our language, are picked up by our children and they try to imitate them.

Some gestures have a different meaning in different languages. Sometimes they even mean the opposite.

When using for example the sign "you're smart" in Dutch by pointing and slightly tilting the index finger at our head, can be misunderstood as it signifies "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 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 one kind of sign across our languages, without being aware of introducing contradictive elements in our conversation.

NAVIGATE

Every language has its own verbal communication style which in the context of intercultural communication is often described as a continuum from low-context to high-context communication styles, and which also distinguishes between indirect and direct communication styles*.

What we notice when communicating across languages and cultures, is the different intonation and the way we take turns in conversations.

We tend to perceive the difference when others speak slower, faster, accentuate words in a different way, and are more silent or more talkative. What about the languages you speak at home or in your community: how do they differ?



Verbal communication

- How do you perceive your and your partner's communication style? (*intonation, pace, pitch, general articulation etc.*)

- What kind of **turn-taking** are you most comfortable with?

*I talk more in detail about indirect and direct communication style as well as low- and high-context communication styles in my trainings and workshops about intercultural communication.

NAVIGATE

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 the other when switching languages.

Some people say, that they feel like "switching personality" when they switch languages, but that should not be misunderstood with having multiple personalities in the sense of a pathological disorder: being multilingual and using multiple languages is not a disorder!*

Whatever communication style we use with other adults, when communicating with our children – especially with babies and infants – we tend to slow down our pace. We pause more often and observe, in order to give them time to respond.

It has been scientifically proven, that children engage more when we use age appropriate child directed speech, thus e.g., the infant directed speech, which consists in "exaggerated intonation patterns, short utterances and frequent repetitions"**.



*Do multilinguals have multiple personalities?

** Annick De Houwer, *Bilingual Development in Childhood*, CUP, 2021.

NAVIGATE

Some parents might recognize that they use a higher pitch, put more emphasis on articulation, and choose a more engaging, less flat intonation and communication style when interacting with infants.

Interestingly, with regard to children learning one language with lexical tone and one without lexical tone, the following was observed:

"in learning new words, 12 to 13 month-old-Mandarin-English infants relied on lexical tone in a Mandarin context, but disregarded tone as a clue in an English context"*.

From very early on, children are actually capable to fully distinguish the importance or role of tone in the target languages.



* Annick De Houwer, *Bilingual Development in Childhood*, CUP, 2021, p.11.



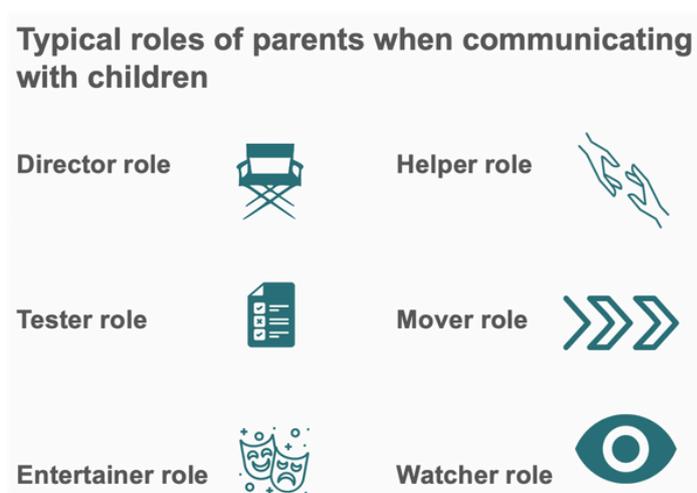
PARENT'S COMMUNICATION STYLES

In multilingual families we tend to have different communication styles. These styles do not only depend on our cultural and linguistic background, but also on the role we play when interacting and communicating with others.

Our roles when communicating with our children 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 and difficulties.

Please find out what roles* you play more frequently, and how you can adjust it in order to optimize the communication with your child.

Elaine Weitzman distinguishes six major types of parent's roles when communicating with children.



*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.



What role or roles do you play when interacting with your children?

Director role:

___ I tend to do more of the talking and tell my children what to do, when and how.

___ I tend to speak more *to* my children and not *with* them; I rarely engage in a conversation with my children.

If you notice that you tend to frequently play the director role, invite your children to lead the conversation, the game or activity. Allow them to decide what to wear, how to wear it, how to eat, what to play, what page to "read" in a book etc.

Tester role:

___ I mainly want to see what skills my children have acquired.

___ I am working hard with my child to attain the developmental milestones.

___ I tend to ask my children a lot of questions to find out what they have learned.

If you notice that you tend to frequently play the tester role, try to focus on the connection with your children and the fun during the activities you do with them. Observe what your children can do without asking for it.



Entertainer role:

___ I focus about having fun with my children and invest a lot of time and energy in keeping my children amused.

___ I do most of the talking and playing, and tend to take the lead of the game/activity.

If you notice that you tend to frequently play the entertainer role, invite your children to take the lead, to suggest an activity or game themselves for example.

Helper role:

___ I tend to focus mainly on my children's needs (eating, sleeping etc.).

___ I don't seem to notice when my children respond, or when they expect me to respond.

If you notice that you tend to frequently play the helper role, observe how your children respond to what you do, and try to spend more one-on one time with them.

Mover role:

___ I am very busy most of the time. I feel like running around the whole time and need to follow a clear schedule.

___ I feel we are always "on the run/move".

If you notice that you tend to frequently play the mover role, allow yourself to slow down, at least for some time, and to focus on connecting with your child through any activity you both like

NAVIGATE



Watcher role:

- ___ I am unsure about how to interact with my children.
- ___ I prefer observing my children play.
- ___ I do comment on what my children do, but they don't really engage in conversations with me.

If you notice that you are playing the watcher role, try to get at the level of your children. If they play on the carpet, sit down next to them and observe what they are doing. Ask them to participate in the game, and let them lead you.

We usually play different roles in the interaction with our children and these can vary depending on the situation.

If you notice that you tend to mainly play one or two of the roles mentioned here above, and if you feel stuck in these roles, or would like to optimize the communication with your children, try to find out what makes you play a particular role in a particular situation.

Reasons can be manyfold. It can be because we lack time, are not patient enough at the moment, worry about the development of our children or worry about other aspects of life.

We can not always make it right, and our children need to know that we can play different roles when interacting with them. Finding a healthy balance of all these roles would be ideal, however it is up to you to find out what works best for you and your children!

What makes you smile? What makes your children smile?

WHAT KIND OF COMMUNICATOR IS YOUR CHILD?



Knowing what kind of communicators your children are, helps you to support their language development and communication skills.

The checklist here below allows you to not only identify the communicator style of each of your children, but also to accordingly foster their communication and language learning.

Please indicate with the letter **O** (often), **S** (sometimes), **R** (rarely) what best describes your child.

Discoverer

- My child responds to music by becoming quiet.
- My child responds to music by increasing his/her activity (for instance, kicking feet or making sounds).
- My child watches my face when I sing.
- My child makes sounds when I sing .
- My child reacts in some way when I pause, look at him/her and/or if I wait after a song is over.

Communicator

- My child performs song actions along with me, such as clapping or falling down (in "Ring Around the Rosie").
- My child plays a toy instrument – for instance, banging on a toy drum.
- My child sings along with me by making simple sounds like "ba", "ma" or "da".
- My child imitates sounds and sound patterns in songs and rhymes.
- My child moves the body to the music.
- My child uses a sound or an action to ask for a music routine.
- My child takes a turn in a song or a rhyme by filling in a missing action or sound. (ex. Bah bah black *sheep* (child) have you any whool...yes *sir* yes *sir* (child) three bags full).

First Words user

- ___ My child uses the word "more" or "again" to ask me to repeat a song.
- ___ My child names a song with one word.
- ___ My child asks for a song or a rhyme using a specific word, such as "Bunny" for "Sleeping Bunnies".
- ___ My child fills in a missing word or sign that comes at the end of a line in the song or rhyme.
- ___ My child plays a toy instrument along with music.

Combiner

- ___ My child takes turns with two or more words in music activities.
For example: "More 'Bus'."
- ___ My child fills in two or three missing words at the end of a line in a song. For example, if I sing "Tip me over and..." my child will say "Pour me out".
- ___ My child has begun to carry a tune.
- ___ My child sings songs with one or two recognizable words.
- ___ My child associates songs and rhymes with everyday activities and experiences. For example, if we see a spider on the ground, my child may say "Insy Weensy Spider".

Elaine Weitzman, *It Takes Two to Talk. A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays*, ON, The Hanen Centre, 2017, p.164-165.

NAVIGATE

Four Communication styles in children*

Please be aware that our children can use different communication styles depending on the situation, the person they are with and the language they are using or are exposed to in this situation, and, of course, their current capability of understanding the 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

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

I describe the different styles in the course.



*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.

2) Reluctant Communication Style

Children with a 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 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 (toys, games).

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

NAVIGATE

4) Own Agenda Communication

Children with this communication style tend to play independently and alone, and only communicate with others when they need something.

It might be difficult to get a message across to these children as they seem immersed in their own little 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 a more passive/inactive or the own agenda communication style, when they are not yet fluent enough in the daycare/school language!

It is advisable for parents to explain the 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.

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.

How to best activate pre-verbal communication skills

- Have **face to face moments**: sit with your child on your lap, have tummy time down on the floor and *interact*.
- Encourage your child to **imitate**. You can imitate the sounds and gestures your child makes – it teaches your child turn-taking.
- Use a lot of **gestures** to accompany talking and singing.
- Use **child-directed speech**.



Please watch the interview with [Speech and Language Therapist Mary-Pat O'Malley](#).

And have a look at this video about **child directed speech**

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

JOIN



We can not raise our child all by ourselves, because we need other people around us to provide to the child the necessary enabling experience to function in society.

We need a multilingual village to raise a multilingual child.

(adapted from an African saying)

Ute Limacher-Riebold PhD



This does not mean that single parents can not raise multilingual children, but they need other people in their life who provide input and support, and strategies to transmit more than one language themselves – if this is their goal.*

When defining or finding our *multilingual village*, there are several aspects to consider, especially when we raise our children abroad, possibly in various different countries, because of frequent moves.

But also when we live in one place for a longer period, finding supportive people might not be easy. And even if we find other families who speak our languages, it might be that they are not able to support our languages in the way we need it.

Try to answer the questions on the next pages to find out, who could become part of your multilingual village.



[Single parents can raise a bi/multilingual child](#)

JOIN

Who in your family and community is:

- **ready** to **support** your language **regularly**
- **motivated** to support your children with **age appropriate** input
- **using** a **variety** of **resources**



Try to find people from **different age groups** and with a **variety** of **interests**.

JOIN



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, such that they understand the meaning and are interested in the topics!

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.

Connections via video can be an alternative solution, but shouldn't become the only option since very young children respond better to in-person communications.

If, for different reasons, you are the only one to provide the input in your language, that will be temporary sufficient.

The reason why I emphasize the multilingual village, is because the older our children get, the greater the impact from their social environment will be on their overall development (think about the conscious mind mentioned above!).

Having some people who support us with our languages 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 only 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 and 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. the daycare and preschool.

No matter if you choose a bilingual daycare or not, you should find out if it's frequented by other multilingual children, if your languages are supported by the daycare, and if your children are allowed to speak your home languages on the playground, etc.. Especially when our children start daycare in an additional language, they will need some time to adjust to the new language and setting.

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



About accents...

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.

Many parents worry that their children will copy the accent or grammatical mistakes from those who are not native speakers. Fact is, that we all have accents, either from another language or from a variety of the target language.

One of the most longstanding myths is that "true" bi/multilinguals don't have an accent.

Having or not having an accent in any language depends on many factors: the age when we acquired the language, our very personal capacity to articulate the sounds of the other language and the time and energy we put on working on our pronunciation – just think about actors who receive trainings to imitate accents!

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[s] if acquired before age six, other extend the window to age twelve..."

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

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

Children can distinguish between accents, and interestingly are able to identify the more standardized sounding ones!

If we can not provide more standardized versions of the target language, or if we feel that our child needs more respective input for some reason, we can use audiobooks, recordings, later movies etc., to transmit a variety of more standardized sounding input.

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

They are more understanding than monolingual peers who are not as flexible in understanding a broader range of ways to pronounce words and convey thoughts.

This is a great asset in an international setting, because multilinguals don't categorize their 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?

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Providing consistent and qualitatively high-level oral language input is important for a healthy and steady language development.

Children are naturally set up to communicate, whether with gestures or sounds.

But the human brain is not naturally set up to read and write. These are two skills we need to learn, and it takes time to do so.*

When we sing nursery rhymes with our toddlers, we are helping them to build foundational skills for reading.

Several **pre-literacy skills** have been identified as predictors of later reading ability levels (follow the explanation in my course):

- **vocabulary**
- **narrative skills**
- **phonological awareness**
- **print awareness**
- **print motivation**
- **letter knowledge**

When children build skills in these areas, they are preparing to become readers. As parents, we can help them developing these skills. We are mostly no teachers, but if we raise our children abroad and we are not sure how much support they will get to develop literacy skills in our home languages, it is good to know what we can do ourselves to support them.

*Marianne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*. The Story and Science of the Reading Brain, Harper Perennial, 2007.

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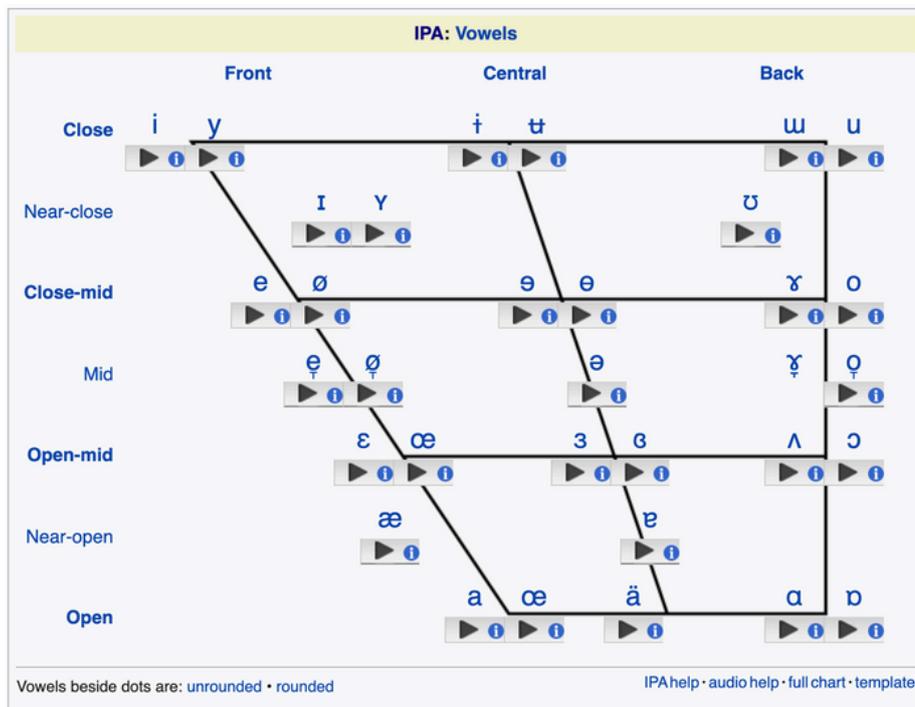
Exploring sounds

Exploring sounds is a very easy way to start.

TIP:

Please find out how you articulate sounds in your own languages, how they differ and what sounds your languages have in common and which ones differ. Explore also the other languages, namely your partner's language, the community language etc. Find an interactive phonetic chart with audio here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IPA_vowel_chart_with_audio



©wikipedia

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Vocabulary

Knowing how to articulate sounds in our languages and how they are connected with the letters or signs, is an important step in language development.

We want to foster communication by repeating the sounds that our children articulate first by cooing, then babbling, later by uttering monosyllables and increasingly longer words and sentences.

Our children need to hear words, phrases very often to make sense of them, and to understand how and when the words are used.

They also need the opportunity to experiment with words, try out all kind of articulations before they are able to apply the very articulation, pronunciation, and intonation required for a successful communication.

Young children naturally categorize sounds into units that are meaningful in all their languages, which is an important part of their phonological development. We don't have to tell them what to do, but they learn by imitating what and how we say things.

In order to foster our children's **word comprehension**, it is important to **point out**, **label**, and **talk** about things in our children's environment at home ("Look what I have in the cupboard...", "Let's play with the blue car...") in the **grocery store** ("Let's get three red apples", "Where is the bread?..."), and when we are **out and about** ("look at the leaves falling from the tree!", "did you see that duck over there, near the pond?").

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Speaking with our children, exposing them to a variety of words and contexts is like planting seeds.



“A most important factor in raising a bilingual child is the language that surrounds language.

The gardener cannot make the language seeds grow. All the gardener can do is to provide certain conditions: a rich soil, light, water and careful tending.

Language growth in children requires the minimum of pruning- these are tender, young plants. Correcting language continuously, getting the child to repeat sentences is the kind of pruning that can have a negative effect on language growth.

The role of the language gardener is to provide a stimulating soil- a variety of pleasurable environments for language growth. Language growth can be slow. There will be many anxious days when tender young shoots do not develop smoothly, and later they are in danger of breaking among the strong winds of peer pressure. The **parent as language gardener** can help maximize those conditions that are open to influence, but parents cannot control the growth of language.”

Colin Baker, *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*, Multilingual Matters (2014, p. 38)

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Narrative Skills

Narrative Skills include the ability to tell stories, as well as to describe things and events. This skill set is important for reading comprehension, and is about grasping meaning from a story. Our children acquire these narrative skills by listening to us when we tell them a story, read a picture book or other books to them, and practice sequencing of any type, e.g. putting one toy next to or on top of another.

You can help your toddler with developing narrative skills by:

1. Reading simple picture books with your child
2. Acting out familiar tales
3. Practicing sequencing the pages as children re-tell the story
4. Use storytelling puppets, magnet board pictures or flannel board pieces
5. Start with sequencing pictures or toys when playing

We should encourage our children to share their thoughts:

- with our babies and infants in the cooing and babbling phase, we can repeat what they are saying with an intonation that encourages them to "say more"
- when our children produce monosyllables, by repeating the monosyllables in contexts with other monosyllables
- when our children say sentences and are able to distinguish between "before" and "after", introduce the terms "first", "then", "later", "after" etc.

We can help our children to use their words in simple and increasingly complex order.

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Phonological Awareness

When our children start understanding the connection between the sounds and the written words – usually they would ask what is written on the page, or follow our finger pointing at the sentences we are currently reading to them – they gain phonological awareness.

Nursery rhymes and songs in general, help children to build phonological awareness in a natural way. They will start to recognize rhyming words – like *hat, cat, fat, rat...* – and can naturally explore them by repeating them.*

Print Awareness

Print awareness is what our children gain when exposed to print (books, magazines, posters etc.).

Especially when the languages in our family have different alphabets or prints, it is important to share these with our children through reading, and through having them available as printed on posters, packages etc.



[How to foster our 4-7 year old children's reading skills in multiple languages](#)

*We share some word games in our *Toolbox for Multilingual Families*, 2020.

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Explore the **linguistic landscape** at **home** and in your **community**.

Where can you find your **languages** in print, pictures or in objects that represent your culture(s)?



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Print Motivation

There is nothing more inspiring and motivating for a child than to see someone else enjoying a read! Motivation is key for every learning process, and when looking at books is perceived as a fun activity, we plant the seeds for our children to become readers.

Especially when we raise our children abroad and when the only input in our language is provided by ourselves, books are often the only way to talk about topics outside of the daily experience. By exploring stories in books, we can take our children on a journey across the world, across time, and dive into a variety of situations that will enrich their experience with the language.

TIP:

The local library might have books in your home language, or the embassy of your country might have either a library or can give you useful hints on where to find suitable books for your child.

I always encourage to form local expats/international groups of parents, and to organize playdates and activities with toddlers, as well as to swap books.

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Letter Knowledge

Although this skill applies to preschool children, it can never harm to have prints available or visible for children at every age.

Fun alphabet puzzles or memory games with colorful letters, with objects and animals that the children recognize and can articulate, can make it easier for them to recognize the letters in print (or on screen).

TIP:

Find posters of your alphabet and hang it on a wall, next or opposite to the one of the other language(s) you use in your family. This visual aid can help you later to describe words or ways to pronounce words in each language to the children.

In order to practice letters for fun, you can trace them in the sand, the snow, soil or in a salt tray. Or you can make pancakes in the shape of letters. There is no limit to imagination!

Many literacy skills can be transferred from the school language to the home language and vice versa.

– Jim Cummins since 1979

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Reading and storytelling

We don't need to teach our children how to read before they are ready. We may want to read with them from very early on though.

"Becoming bilingual whether from birth or soon after, or subsequently in early childhood prior to schooling, entails a complex interaction between what children bring to the learning task, that is, among others, speech segmentation skills, speed of processing, and the linguistic and cultural environments in which they grow up.

Quantity and quality of input are strong predictors of children's early lexical skills, which in turn are closely related with emerging grammatical skills".

(Ludovica Serratrice, *Becoming Bilingual in Early Childhood*, in A. De Houwer and L. Ortega, *The Cambridge Handbook of Bilingualism*, CUP, 2019, p.35)

The practice of book reading, storytelling and singing songs that are associated with larger vocabularies in monolingual children have been found to be of importance for multilingual children (Ludovica Serratrice).

Reading and storytelling promote brain development, imagination helps developing language, and emotions strengthen the bond we have with our children.

If you can establish a reading routine from very early on, you'll be more likely to commit to fostering literacy in your children in the years to come.

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How to read with your babies, toddlers and preschoolers



choose the right moment (for you and your child)



choose age appropriate and engaging books



adjust your pace to your children's pace and attention span



choose books with songs, rhymes, rhythms and repetitions



vary intonations, act out scenes, do role-play, clap to the rhythm etc.



point at words

Reading with our children should always be a pleasant moment of connection.

When raising our children with multiple languages, we may want to schedule moments separately dedicated to each language. Picture books are great to be read in multiple languages, and they can be interesting for children of all ages! Try to follow your child's lead in terms of length of the reading session and the topic.

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Reading with young children can be boring and frustrating for parents. We usually have a fast pace and prefer specific books and topics. Changing our pace and focusing on topics that seem "easy" can be tiring.

If you notice that you are getting frustrated, take a break and an inner step back. Ask your child some questions about the book, an image in the book, the story, or, if you are tired, choose another moment to dedicate to this activity.

You can also add some variation by choosing audiobooks (have a look at this [Spotify Playlist](#) where you can find audio material categorized per language and age).

Find out how multi-literacy-friendly your home is*



*you can download the checklist on [my site](#)

YES!



This is the last step of this "round" on your *ENJOY* journey. As I mentioned above, we can re-visit all the steps at any further moment in time, whenever we observe that some aspects need to be updated and strategies or goals need to be re-defined.

Take a moment to go through what you have learned and implemented so far.

Take your time to find answers to the many questions asked in this workbook, and, please, feel free to ask me any question either in the comments section of the course, via my facebook group or by email.

I invite you to set three attainable (i.e. realistic) goals to implement in the next three months

After 60 days, I suggest you to assess **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

SOME RESOURCES

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



SOME RESOURCES



You can find more resources on my website [Ute's International Lounge](#).

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](#).