



Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme



Multilingual Families



University of  
Bedfordshire

# ON BILINGUALISM IN (MONOLINGUAL?) ENGLISH CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT - THE CHALLENGES FOR CHILDREN, PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

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## OUR FAMILY

- Polish-English (Maja speaks Polish, Tony speaks English & Zuzia - the child speaks both but is not a balanced bilingual – English is a dominant language)



## KEEPING THE LANGUAGE, TRADITIONS & CUSTOMS

- Promethidion – folk dance & singing group
- PBIC – various events
- Saturday school



# RESEARCH – WHY THIS SUBJECT?

- Own experience
- Working with PBIC
- Realisation that this may not be an individual/alienated case

And reflection on:

- Uniqueness of my own position – educated & speaking English well
- (Sad) insights into the situation of other children & parents



# ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE SCALES, SECOND EDITION (OWLS-II)

- Provides a complete and integrated picture of oral and written language skills across a wide age
- Age: 3 through 21 years for Listening Comprehension and Oral Expression Scales; 5 through 21 years for Reading Comprehension and Written Expression Scales
- Scale scores provided as age- and grade-based standard scores, test-age equivalents, grade equivalents, percentile ranks, and descriptive categories; plus 5 Composites—Oral Language, Written Language, Receptive Language, Expressive Language, and Overall Language



## INDIVIDUAL CASES

**Case 1:** An incredibly bright girl in Y1 of primary school – her teacher thinks she is average and her mother reported that Polish children are treated 'differently'

**Case 2:** A teenage girl who came to England only a year ago – 'off the scale' in written language (despite of using it daily only within the last year) – her teachers reported her language skills to be 'basic'

**Case 3:** A 9-year-old boy with severe delays and complex problems. School largely ignored his needs so far and could not see why the mother insisted on teaching him Polish while his English is not well developed (a widely spread myth that SEN children should not be 'overwhelmed' with having to learn 2 languages at the same time



# CASE 1

- Age 6 years 1 months
- Gender: female
- Background info: Polish family (both parents Polish and the child's dominant language is reported to be Polish, began using English more when she went to a school less than 2 years ago). Mum reported that the girls can be 'naughty' and fidgety' but she attributed it to the fact that the child gets bored easily. Mum not happy with the way Polish children are treated at school (as 'different') and she thinks their abilities are not recognised and children are not being challenged/ encouraged to learn more.
- Teacher's opinion: Very basic English (beginner). Attainment reported: average for science & geography & R.E. & above average for literacy, numeracy, history & other social studies, art, D.T., ICT, P.E., music. Perceived as having done very well in Y1, enthusiastic for learning, determined to learn, having a strong character and asking questions if doesn't understand sth



## CASE 2 - SCORES

**Table 1: Standard scores**

Listening comprehension	Oral expression	Reading comprehension	Written expression
92	79	99	137
Average	Below Average	Average	Very superior (less than 2.2% of pupils this age achieve such a score)

**Table 2: Composite scores**

Composite	Sum of standard scores	Standard score <span style="background-color: #00FF00;">Age</span> or grade	Confidence interval 90% or <span style="background-color: #00FF00;">95%</span>	Percentile rank	Description
Oral language	171	84	79-89	14	Below average (slightly)
Written language	236	120	116-124	91	Above average
Receptive language (LC+RC)	191	94	90-98	34	Average
Expressive language (OE + WE)	216	109	104-114	73	Average
Overall language	407	102	99-105	55	Average



## CASE 1 - SUMMARY

- Given that this very young child (6.1 years) is a sequential bilingual (family speaks Polish at home and Polish was the first language she was exposed to) and started using English every day only 2 years ago, when she began attending an English school her scores indicate a remarkable progress in language development. Sequential bilinguals usually have a language delay of approximately 2 years. However, this child not only has no delays in any area of language development but achieved a remarkably high score for writing expression.
- Writing is the most complex and sophisticated skill that language learners have to develop and many children achieve lowest scores on the written expression scale. This girl, however, achieved the highest score and is clearly gifted when it comes to writing.



## CASE 2

- Age 13 years 7 months
- Gender: female
- Background info: Comes from a Polish family that arrived in the UK only a year ago. She learned English at school in Poland. Sequential bilingual with Polish as a dominant language atm. Parents not happy with the school's efforts – she is not challenged, her ability is not recognised, she can do much better but teachers are not bothered. Due to EAL the girl is perceived as not cognitively able. Tasks are very easy and far below her level (what she was doing back in Poland). She is also shy & withdrawn.
- Teacher's opinion: 'Very basic English' with 'some elements of communicative English. 'No concerns. Works really hard and was very keen to improve English'



## CASE 2 - SCORES

Table 1: Standard scores

Listening comprehension	Oral expression	Reading comprehension	Written expression
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Average	Below Average	Average	Very superior (less than 2.2% of pupils this age achieve such a score)

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Overall language	407	102	99-105	55	Average

## CASE 2 - SUMMARY

- This girl obtained a standard score of **137** on the Written Expression (WE) scale with a percentile rank of **99**. This indicated a very superior score when compared to the scores of her same-age peers - performance higher than 99% of other children of this age. Test-age equivalent showed that she was performing on the written expression in a way that average **21 years 11 months** young adult would.
- Large gap between oral expression and written expression (58 standard points). Many sequential bilinguals find it easier to express their ideas in writing than orally – this is because while writing they have more time to formulate their thoughts and pay attention to grammar, style, form, etc. **The danger here is that oral language is something that teachers, peers and other people with whom the child interacts notice first and usually make judgement based on the oral proficiency.**
- Given that she arrived in this country only one year ago, she has made a remarkable progress and it is likely that her oral expression will steadily improve but (sadly) so far
- Her talent (creative writing) has not been recognised – quite to the contrary she is perceived as below average and not given more complex/demanding written tasks.

## CASE 3

- Age: 9 years 8 months
- Gender: male
- Background info: The mother reported many of the child's difficulties as well as her efforts in ensuring the school takes her concerns on-board and provides the required support. So far, it has been a challenging journey and **the parent is not happy with the school's efforts**. The child recently has been diagnosed with ADHD and Asperger and there are also signs of dyspraxia . Recently the mother received a statement of SEN and the child was assigned 32 hours of individual support instruction.
- Teacher's opinion: **'X is very well supported and cared for at school but a lack of support from home has hindered potential progress'**. Communicative language, attainment 'far below average' in literacy & numeracy and 'below average' in science & history and other social studies. He regularly goes out with LSA for phonics work & reading.



## CASE 3 - SCORES

- Table 1: Standard scores

Listening comprehension	Oral expression	Reading comprehension	Written expression
81	84	83	75
Below Average	Below average	Below average	Below Average

- Table 2: Composite scores

Composite	Sum of standard scores	Standard score Age or grade	Confidence interval 90% or 95%	Percentile rank	Description
Oral language	165	81	76-86	10	Below average
Written language	158	79	75-83	8	Below average
Receptive language	116	53	49-57	0.1	Deficient
Expressive language	123	60	55-65	0.4	Deficient
Overall language	274	64	61-67	1	Deficient

## CASE 3 - SUMMARY

- Below average/deficit level of language development
- Written expression score the lowest
- Overall language score indicates the overall language deficiency and suggests that currently the child is performing better than only 1% of children his age in the general population
- Although it is clear that the child has SEN and struggles with all areas of language development, he speaks both English and Polish (English dominant but Polish good, communicative level) and, contrary to an assumption that the 2<sup>nd</sup> language would be a burden, the child is copying well. He has a very strong Polish-Irish identity, which can be drawn upon & used as a resource



# OVERALL SUMMARY (OF PRELIMINARY SMALL SCALE STUDY FINDINGS)

- Frequent mismatches between the children factual language abilities and teachers' perceptions
- Lack of deeper understanding of bi-and multilingualism – myths still prevalent; teachers treating all bi- & multilinguals as if they were a homogenous group; misperceptions of language dominance, treating bi-& multilinguals as cases with SEN (even though it is illegal!)
- Parents' lack of power (knowledge, language skills, negotiation skills, overall position of migrants in the society)

However

- Some schools are doing a good job (engaging parents, employing bilingual TAs – though still rarely teachers, running language or culture clubs)





# QUESTIONS – ALWAYS MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

- Although celebration of diversity and multiculturalism and multilingualism are frequently used phrases, do they really mean anything? Do we go beyond the shallow recognition of diversity?
- Is multilingualism really celebrated in English (largely monolingual) classrooms?
- The paradox of language education in the UK – push for learning languages (but only 'prestigious' languages?). Consider that Polish is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most commonly spoken language in the UK
- Are the myths surrounding bilingualism still alive? If so what impact may it have on our children?
- Polish parents often dissatisfied with English schools – system perceived as too permissive and laid back. Children not challenged enough/ encouraged to learn more. Issues around learner-centredness & less direction from teachers. Clash of expectations (based on previous educational experiences) and the reality of English schools.
- Perhaps also teachers not able to see beyond the language (oral expression)?



## THE FINAL WORD

- Not all bleak – schools are stretched but recognise more needs to be done and some wants to cooperate:

Mrs. Jankowska

Many thanks for your information sharing and, in particular, your recommendations for Robert's individual support plan.

I will discuss these with our SENDCo, Mrs. ... in order to target the support that is going to have the most impact bearing in mind the complexity of X's needs as you point out. It is clear that we need to draw on multi agency support to help us understand his needs further and to ensure that the individual support plan is appropriate.

Thanks once again for sharing this information.

Kindest regards (headteacher, case 3)



## THE FINAL WORD

- These findings are preliminary and based on a very small sample. However, similar issues have been reported by many other parents. More research has to be done.
- Educate Polish people about the English system (manage expectations better)?
- More training opportunities for teachers



# THANK YOU

- Please get in touch

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