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LANGUAGE USE OF A BILINGUAL CHILD – AN ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES¹

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence of maternal and paternal languages on the development of a bilingual child's language. It is assumed that a mother's language has the greatest influence on a child's language. In addition, maternal language is responsible for the largest part of the variety in the language children understand and use as well as the development of bilingualism. We also believe that fathers influence the language of a home and mothers influence the language of a child. In our analysis, the focus is on the quantity and quality of exposure to the given languages, the pattern of language used by parents, the language of formal instruction and the style of parent-child interaction. Over one hundred and fifty case studies were under examination depicting various language constellations, such as e.g. Polish and English, Polish and Russian, Polish and German, Polish and Ukrainian, Polish and Belarusian, Polish and Italian. Hence, with this paper we hope to be able to better understand cross-linguistic influence on bilingual speakers.

KEYWORDS: bilingual child, bilingualism, multilingualism

STRESZCZENIE

Głównym celem tego artykułu jest zbadanie wpływu języka matki i ojca na rozwój języka dwujęzycznego dziecka. Zakłada się, że język matki ma największy wpływ na język dziecka. Ponadto język matki jest odpowiedzialny za największą część różnorodności w języku, który dzieci rozumieją i używają, a także za rozwój dwujęzyczności. Uważamy również, że ojcowie wpływają na język domu, a matki wpływają na język dziecka. W naszej analizie skupiamy się na ilości i jakości ekspozycji na dane języki, schemacie używania języka przez rodziców, języku formalnych instrukcji i stylu interakcji rodzic-dziecko. Przebadano ponad sto pięćdziesiąt studiów przypadków przedstawiających różne konstelacje językowe, takie jak np. polski i angielski, polski i rosyjski, polski i niemiecki, polski i ukraiński, polski i białoruski, polski i włoski. W związku z tym mamy nadzieję, że dzięki niniejszemu artykułowi będziemy mogli lepiej zrozumieć wpływ międzyjęzykowy na osoby dwujęzyczne.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: dwujęzyczne dziecko, dwujęzyczność, wielojęzyczność

¹ The results of the study described in this paper were presented at the *Sociolinguistics Symposium*, University of Auckland, New Zealand, 27–30.06.18.

INTRODUCTION

Bilingualism is a phenomenon that is interesting for many scientific disciplines, such as linguistics, psychology and pedagogy. Each of these disciplines investigates selected aspects of bilingualism (multilingualism) and each of them creates its own definition of this concept drawing on its particular interests. *Bilingualism* can refer both to individuals as well as whole social groups/ communities.² The subject of this paper is the *individual bilingualism*.

The term *individual bilingualism* is considered, generally speaking, an ability of a human being to make use of more than one language (cf. e.g. Arsenian [1937]1972: 16). At the basis of such an understanding of bilingualism lies the criterion of language competence in both languages (cf. e.g. De Cillia 1994: 12). As the analysis of the literature on the subject indicates, this criterion can be very differently applied to bilingual people, i.e. the “requirements” referring to the level of competences in both languages of a given person necessary to recognise him or her as bilingual are very different. The positions adopted by bilingualism researchers cover practically the whole range of possibilities. At one extreme is the definition presented by Bloomfield (1933: 56), who requires bilingual people to have a “native-like control of two languages”. At the other end of the scale, for example, bilingualism can start, as Skutnabb-Kangas (1987: 82), drawing on Haugen (1953), points out, “at the point where the speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language”.

From the point of view of contemporary bilingualism research, none of these positions can be considered satisfactory. On the one hand, the term “native-like control” is very imprecise, because not all native users control their language in the same way and to the same extent (cf. Grucza 1993). Both the level of language proficiency and the range of using a language in particular life spheres can vary to a large extent. On the other hand, there is no doubt that not all people with the ability to understand or create utterances in the second language should be automatically considered bilingual.

In the literature on the subject, in the context of considerations on bilingualism, a distinction is made between the “surface competence” of the second language/ foreign language (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills/ BICS) and “academically related language competence” (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency/ Academic Language Proficiency/ CALP), or the abilities to use the second language to perform complex cognitive operations such as processing and expressing knowledge (Cummins 1979; cf. Baker 1993: 11, 26). It is emphasised that the situation in which both languages of a given person are developed to the same extent (“balanced bilingualism”) is rather exceptional than the rule. Most

² For an overview of research on group/ social bilingualism see e.g. Baker (1993: 35 ff); Bertelle (2018: 11 ff).

bilingual people “choose” one of the languages as their dominant language, and the other – as their “weaker” language (“functional bilingualism”). Moreover, the proficiency in both languages varies at different stages of life, while the factors that have the greatest impact on the change in the domination relationship between L1 and L2 (sometimes L3) are the language of education and change of the family’s country of residence. The dominant language is in most cases the language of education of a given bilingual person and/ or the language of the social majority of the country/ region where the bilingual person lives the longest.

In addition, these definitions do not take into account many additional aspects, the importance of which is emphasised in research on bilingualism (cf. Baker 1993; Li Wei 2008). These include, above all:

- the age when the second language acquisition process began;
- the social and cultural context of the bilingual development process;
- the emotional attitude of a bilingual person towards both languages, cultures, as well as towards his or her own bilingualism.

On account of that, for the purposes of this paper, rather than attempting to define the bilingualism we have concentrated on defining a bilingual person in terms of the following criteria (cf. Arsenian [1937]1972):

- the level of proficiency in both languages;
- the individual assessment of one’s own bilingualism by a bilingual person;
- the moment of the first intensive contact with the second language;
- the nature of the second language acquisition process.

SUBJECTS OF THE ANALYSIS

The subjects of the present analysis were 178 case studies of bilingual speakers, which were conducted by the students of the Faculty of Applied Linguistics of the University of Warsaw in years 2013–2017 within the framework of a research project devoted to selected aspects of bilingualism.³

Language biographies of bilinguals (in some cases multilingual speakers) were prepared on the basis of interviews or in the case of small children – interviews with their parents or custodians. In relation to the 4 criteria mentioned before, the students’ task was to prepare a biography of one bilingual person who can be defined as:

- a person with a level of competence in both languages that allows him or her to perform cognitive processing of knowledge in both languages, referred to as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (taking into consideration the person’s age);

³ The Case Studies being the subject of the analysis in the present paper have not been published yet. The materials have been documented for the project purposes and are in the Author’s possession (MO-S).

- a person whose first intensive contact with both languages took place during the so called sensitive period (cf. e.g. Patkowski 1980: 450, 462), i.e. during the first 10–11 years of life, when each language is acquired by a child as “his or her mother tongue” (Wode 2000);
- thus, a person whose acquisition process was natural from the perspective of language processing in the brain of a bilingual person, irrespective of the context of the acquisition, i.e. in the family, in the bilingual environment or in the educational context, for example, bilingual/ immersion programmes;
- a person who is aware of one’s own bilingualism irrespective of the objective evaluation of his or her language proficiency in both languages. In other words, a person who subjectively describes himself or herself as a bilingual individual (Aleemi 1991; Jonekeit/ Kielhöfer 1995).

To complete the task, the students had to conduct an unstructured interview, which means that the interviews did not take place according to a predefined questionnaire to minimise the risk of occurrence of suggested responses. On the contrary, the researchers were free to choose and formulate questions. Generally speaking, the questions referred, above all, to a family situation of bilingual (multilingual) speakers, their attitude to both languages and cultures, their own bilingualism (and biculturalism) as well as the subjective assessment of linguistic competence in both languages and experiences connected with bilingualism.

The interviewee’s personal data were anonymised. All the students participating in the research project agreed to use their case studies in the further analysis.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The authors of the study are fully aware of its limitations and the fact that it is difficult to generalise from even a larger number of case studies to a broader population (Duff 2012). Our goal was not to universalise but to particularise and to illustrate the findings with some qualitative data. Accordingly, we sought to corroborate previous findings, to reveal important patterns, to exemplify some phenomena, some regularities, some dependencies described in the literature in a concrete and personal manner. Because of the number of cases, our study can be considered quantitative, but due to the heterogeneity of the material obtained we do not employ an experimental design (e.g. proficiency testing or testing the significance of findings statistically). Although each case was prepared by an individual student in a reliable and comprehensive way and our findings and analyses are consistent with the literature on the subject, we take the material and results of the study with considerable caution.

AIM OF THE ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the analysis was to investigate the influence of maternal and paternal languages on the development of a bilingual child's language and to find out which factors have the strongest influence on some bilingual children achieving such a level of proficiency in L1 and L2, which allows for considering a particular person bilingual, and some not. In our analysis the focus was on:

1. the quality and quantity of exposure to the given languages (how many and what kind of languages the child had contact with and what kind of contact it was);
2. the pattern of language use by parents and style of parent-child interaction (the type, range and context of language use);
3. the language of formal instruction.

The quantitative analysis was carried out in terms of:

- the parents' countries of origins,
- the family's country of residence (the mother's country, the father's country, another country).

For the purposes of this analysis, L1 is defined as a mother's language and L2 is defined as a father's language, regardless of whether the family lives in the mother's or father's country or in a third country, and regardless of which one is dominant for a child. L3 is defined as a third country's language and/ or family language if it is different from L1 and L2. If the language of the family is different from the language of the country of residence of the family, then L3 means the language of the family and the L4 language of the country.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

After an initial analysis out of 178, 46 case studies were rejected due to the inconsistent data, the age of the described person (younger than 6 years old; so the person who continues to undergo intense language development processes characteristic of the sensitive period for language acquisition) and bilingual origins of parents (to eliminate additional, uncontrolled variables). As a result, in total, 132 case studies were further analysed.

As for parents' countries of origins, there were analysed: 103 cases in which the mother was Polish and the father was Italian (18 cases), German (16 cases), British (13 cases), American (4 cases), Canadian (4 cases), French (4 cases), Spanish (4 cases), Austrian (3 cases), Russian (3 cases), Turkish (3 cases), Arabic (2 cases), Belarusian (2 cases), Dutch (2 cases), Finnish (2 cases), Hungarian (2 cases), Indian (2 cases), Lithuanian (2 cases), Norwegian (2 cases), Swedish (2 cases), Swiss (2 cases),

Argentinian (1 case), Australian (1 case), Belgian (1 case), Columbian (1 case), Greek (1 case), Israeli (1 case), Kenyan (1 case), Kuwaiti (1 case), Mexican (1 case), Ukrainian (1 case), Vietnamese (1 case); 20 cases in which the father was Polish and the mother was Russian (3 cases), Italian (3 cases), German (3 cases), British (2 cases), Ukrainian (2 cases), Hungarian (2 cases), Belarusian (2 cases), French (1 case), Bulgarian (1 case), Iranian (1 case); 9 cases in which the mother and the father came from different countries such as: Russia and Ukraine (Russian/ Ukrainian), Ukraine and Lebanon (Ukrainian/ Lebanese), Brazil and Switzerland (Brazilian/ Swiss), the United Kingdom and Italy (British/ Italian), Ukraine and Russia (Ukrainian/ Russian), the United Kingdom and Slovakia (British/ Slovak), Hungary and Germany (Hungarian/ German), China and Greece (Chinese/ Greek), and Belgium and Greece (Belgian/ Greek).

As for the family's country of residence, there were analysed: 35 cases in which the family lived in the mother's country of origin, 86 in which the family lived in the father's country of origin and 11 cases in which the family lived in some other country, different from the mother's and father's country of origin.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The most common strategy of using both languages in a mixed family is "one person one language" (OPOL, cf. Vildomec [1963]1971: 300–301; Paradowski et al. 2016: 129 ff.). This strategy was used in almost 100% of the analysed cases, regardless of whether the family lived in the mother's or father's country or in a third country.

In cases in which the family did not use a "one person one language" strategy, the child usually did not develop language competence in both languages – L1 and L2 – to the extent that they could be considered bilinguals according to the already mentioned criteria. This is most often the case when one parent did not know the language of the other parent and the language of the family was the mother's or father's language (CSs by Osiak, Koper; in such cases the mothers more often had higher competence in terms of the father's language than vice versa – see Table 2 – and the father's language – L2 – became the language of the family (cf. also Bertelle 2018: 192 ff.). The pattern can be seen that the language of one of the parents was not used (or used only at a certain stage of the child's development) in the family if it was a language having a low status in a given language community, e.g. Vietnamese in Poland (CS by Saks), Mandarin Chinese in Greece (CS by Miękus), Polish in an English speaking country (CSs by Korczak and Kozak), Hungarian in Belgium (CS by Kasprzyk), Turkish in Italy (CS by Kiersnowska), or in Poland (CS by Osiak), Arabic in Germany (CS by Michalak), in Italy (CS by Kołakowska), or in Israel (CS by Achmasiewicz). For this reason, either one of the parents or both did not recognise this language as a value in the life of the child.

It often happened that one parent did not make an attempt to use his or her native language when dealing with a child when both of the parents did not know each other's languages and communicated in L3 (usually the family also lived in L3 country – CSs by Kiersnowska, Michalak, Kořakowska, Achmasiewicz, Őwięcicka, Kasprzyk). The child developed L3 instead of L1 or more often instead of L2. Only in one case analysed, the child became trilingual in such a situation (high level of proficiency in L1, L2 and L3, CS by Mroczek). Sometimes the child did not have enough contact with one of the languages because one of the parents (often a father) did not devote much time to the child because of his or her work (e.g. CS by Őwięcicka).

In few cases, despite not using “one person one language” strategy, the child became bilingual in terms of L1 and L2 of his or her parents. It happened in such cases when the child acquired one of the languages (most often L1) at home and L2 at the beginning of education in kindergarten or school (the family lived in the L2 country). In these cases, L2 often became the dominant language of the child (e.g. CS by Krajewska). One case was reported in which the mother's language – L1 – developed only when the family moved to her country (at the time when the child attended lower secondary school, CS by Kardacz).

In some cases, even though the parents used OPOL, but used it only initially at the early stage of the child's linguistic development, the child did not develop language competence in both languages. The reasons for which one of the parents resigned from using his or her native language in contacts with the child might vary and might include the situations when e.g.:

1. one of the parents had a critical attitude towards their country of origin for cultural, social or historical reasons, e.g. in CS by Kozak the mother (she was Polish, the father was Canadian, the family lived in Canada) repeatedly complained to the family about the poor political and economic situation in Poland, lack of prospects for young people and the rate of crime. Therefore, the child evaluated much higher the country where she lived (Canada) and did not see the need to learn the mother's language. When the child went to school, she asked her mother not to speak Polish to her any more, which the mother agreed to;
2. the family was falling apart and the child had limited contact with one of the parents or one parent died and the other did nothing to maintain the knowledge of the other parent's language (CSs by Dąbrowa, Białoszewska, Chodkowski-Gyurics);
3. parents changed the strategy of using both languages when the child started pre-school or school education, in order to help the child to feel fulfilled in a peer group and/ or to succeed in learning, e.g. in CS by Miękus the child developed both languages to the same extent until the age of 3, but when the child started attending kindergarten the family resigned from the mother's language (Mandarinian) and concentrated on the father's language which was the language of instruction (Greek).

The analysis of the available case studies shows that, in line with the literature on the subject (cf. Paradowski et al. 2016: 129 ff.; Bertelle 2018: 88 ff.), the application

of the OPOL strategy is the basic condition for achieving bilingualism, but at the same time the OPOL strategy itself may not be sufficient for a child to develop balanced or functional competence in both languages. In other words, the mere application of the OPOL strategy without the support of other activities does not guarantee the development of bilingual competence (CSs by Miękus, Korczak, Kozak).

As for the actions on the part of parents, which strengthen the OPOL strategy and result in a more developed bilingual competence, they are listed in the tables below.

Table 1. The actions taken on the part of parents in terms of the quality of exposure to the given language

L1 (a mother's language) in a father's country (86 cases)	L2 (a father's language) in a mother's country (35 cases)
1. Visits to the mother's country (58 cases)	1. Visits to the father's country (18 cases)
2. Contacts with the mother's parents and/ or siblings (58 cases)	2. Contacts with the father's parents and/ or siblings (18 cases)
3. Contacts with cousins on the mother's side of a similar age and friends (7 cases)	3. Contacts with cousins on the father's side at a similar age and friends (1 case)
4.	4. Contacts with friends and acquaintances from the father's country in the mother's country (1 case)
5. Reading books in the mother's language (20 cases)	5. Reading books in the father's language (11 cases)
6. Watching cartoons/ TV in the mother's language (20 cases)	6. Watching cartoons/ TV in father's language (11 cases)
7. Hiring a nanny communicating with a child in both mother's and father's language (2 cases)	7. Hiring a nanny communicating with a child in the father's language (2 cases)
8. Spending more time with the mother at the early stage (0–3) during maternity leave (9 cases)	8. Spending more time with the father at the age 0–3 (paternity leave) because the mother works a lot and goes on business trips (1 case)
9. Regular corresponding with and phoning the mother's family to practise the child's writing and speaking skills (1 case)	9. Regular corresponding with and phoning the father's family to practise the child's writing and speaking skills (3 cases)
10. Playing in mother's language (20 cases)	
11. Spending a few months with the mother in her country before the child goes to kindergarten (2 cases)	
12. Taking care of the child by a grandmother on the mother's side for the first 3 years of child's life (4 cases)	

Table 2. The actions taken on the part of parents in terms of the pattern of language use by the family and style of parent-child interaction

L1 (a mother's language) in a father's country (86 cases)	L2 (a father's language) in a mother's country (35 cases)
1. The father's knowledge of and communication with the child in the mother's language (5 cases), including the father's knowledge of the mother's language at C1 level (1 case)	1. The mother's knowledge of and communication with the father in the father's language (13 cases), including the mother's knowledge of the father's language at C1 level (5 cases)
2. Writing two diaries in the mother's and father's language (1 case)	2. Writing a diary in the father's language (2 cases)
3.	3. Parents' knowledge and use of each other's languages (2 cases)
4.	4. Father's lack of knowledge of the mother's language (1 case)
5. Communicating with the siblings in both languages (2 cases)	5.
6. Celebrating the mother's traditions (6 cases)	6. Celebrating the father's traditions (2 cases)

Table 3. The actions taken on the part of parents in terms of the language of formal instruction

L1 (a mother's language) in a father's country (86 cases)	L2 (a father's language) in a mother's country (35 cases)
1. When visiting the mother's country for a longer period of time the child goes to school for one semester (1 case)	1. When visiting the father's family for a longer period of time the child goes to kindergarten (1 case)
2. Teaching the child mother's language by the mother, including reading and writing (1 case)	2. Teaching the child the father's language by the father from the coursebooks from his home country (1 case)
3. Attending additional language courses in the mother's language (3 cases)	3. Attending additional language courses in the father's language (7 cases)
4. Moving to the mother's country and going to school there (1 case)	4. Moving to the father's country and going to school there (6 cases)
5. Starting reading and writing more in the mother's language by the child himself/herself (1 case)	5.
6. Attending bilingual kindergarten/ school (4 cases)	6.

The development of bilingualism in a child is an extremely complicated process, sensitive to various factors that are sometimes dependent on and sometimes independent of parents and which have a direct impact on whether a child develops bilingualism or not and which language becomes his or her dominant language. The language situation of a child is getting considerably complicated when the family resides in a third country. The analysis of 11 cases enables us to notice that in this situation parents took paradoxically fewer actions for the development of L1 and L2 than in the case when the family lived in the L1 or L2 country.

In 4 analysed cases, children in such a life situation developed multilingual competence, i.e. 3 languages (CSs by Grzesiuk, Żmijewska, Wachowicz – 3 cases out of 11) or even 4 languages, because parents in that case communicated with each other in a language other than the language of the country of residence (CS by Zylubek – 1 case out of 11). In the other 6 cases analysed, the child developed bilingual competence in L1/ L2 and L3 instead of L1/ L2 because one of the parents, more often the father, resigned from using his native language in contact with the child in favour of L3 (CSs by Achmasiewicz, Michalak, Kolakowska, Kiersnowska, Świącicka, Kasprzyk). In one case (out of 11, CS by Koper), the child had competence only in L3.

Interestingly, in order to support the development of L1 and L2, even when the father himself gave up the use of L2 in contact with the child, the parents took some additional actions presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The actions taken on the part of parents when the family resides in a third country

L1 (a mother's language) and L2 (a father's language) in another country (L3/ L4 country)
1. Visits to parents' countries (9 cases)
2. Contacts with parents' family (9 cases)
3. Reading books in parents' languages (2 cases)
4. Watching cartoons/ TV in parents' language (2 cases)
5. Phoning parents' families (9 cases)

SUMMARY OF THE ANALYSIS

To sum up, fathers were more likely to give up their native language, which is particularly evident when the family lived in a third country. Even if the family lived in the father's country and the father used this language in the communication with the child, it happened that the father did not attach importance to the development of his language, counting on the fact that the language will develop "itself" as the language of the social majority of this country. Mothers took more and a greater

variety of actions to support the child's bilingual development and were more involved irrespective of whether a family lived in a mother's, father's or third country (e.g. the mothers spent more time with the children at the early stage of child's life – 9 cases in which the mother was on longer maternity leave vs. 1 case in which the father was on longer paternity leave).

Apart from the difference in the quantity of linguistic input provided by mothers and fathers, there are also differences in its quality e.g. 23% of the mothers living in the father's country played with the child in their languages (no such cases reported regarding the fathers living in the mother's country) instead of letting the children watch TV in their languages (23% of the mothers living in the father's country vs. 31% of the fathers living in the mother's country reported doing so); the mothers cultivated contacts with relatives more strongly than the fathers (75% of the mothers living in the father's country vs. 54% of the fathers living in the mother's country reported doing so). Mothers more often know the father's language at a high level of proficiency than fathers know the mother's language (5 cases reported that the mother knew the father's language at C1 level, in just 1 case the father learnt the mother's language at a high level of proficiency – see Table 2).

Because the family lived more often in the country of the father (86 cases vs. 35 cases), despite the fact that the mother put more effort into supporting the development of her language, this language was generally a weaker language, while the dominant language was the language of the social majority.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the available case studies shows that, in line with the literature on the subject, the application of the OPOL strategy is the basic condition for achieving bilingualism, but at the same time the OPOL strategy itself may not be sufficient for the child to develop bilingual competence (there were 14 cases out of 132 cases analysed in which the child's level of competence development in both languages did not allow for considering him or her a bilingual person in accordance with the criteria set at the beginning of the study). In other words, the mere application of the OPOL strategies without the support of additional measures on the part of parents does not guarantee the development of the child's bilingual competence.

The analysis shows that mothers have a much greater impact on the development of bilingualism in a child (see also Bertelle 2018: 199 ff.). However, it also shows that the success or failure of the bilingual child's upbringing process in a mixed family is affected by factors that parents have a limited influence on (such as a family breakdown and as a result, the discontinuation of the contact with one of the languages) or are largely independent of the parents' efforts to actively support the development of child's bilingual competence.

In a few cases, the development of bilingual competence was threatened or disturbed by the child's peer group or extended family, who represented critical attitudes towards the given language and culture. The origin from a mixed family can be a reason for different misunderstandings with peers (e.g. CS by Geppert). In one case, the child was even ostracised by the peers because of the father's Russian origin (the peers claimed that "Russia is Poland's enemy", CS by Sobocka), in another case – because of (negative) stereotypes of a British person (CS by Świda). In one case, speaking the father's language in the mother's country (German in Poland, CS by Kireńczuk) was the reason for reluctance and opposition of the grandfather on the mother's side (Polish) who was prejudiced against Germans because of taking part in the World War II and tried to discourage the child from learning the father's language and contacting his family (CS by Osuchowska).

In some cases, despite the parents' efforts to maintain the even development of both languages of the child, the child rebelled against L1 or L2 because of not feeling the need to develop L1 or L2 competences in the situation of L1 or L2 domination, most often at the beginning of school education (L1 or L2 as the language of formal instruction, CSs by Tabor, Mitek, Kruchlińska, Geppert, Kołakowska, Kiersnowska, Witeska, Błach).

Finally, it should be emphasised that the analysis of case studies in which the process of bilingual education of a child in a mixed family was successful showed additional benefits resulting from this fact. In many cases, the bilinguals reported that they learnt other additional languages with greater ease. They often attribute this ease of learning new languages to their bilingualism (CSs by Pluta, Krawiec). What is very interesting, the bilinguals, if they had a positive experience with their own bilingualism, often reported that they would like to raise bilingual children (e.g. CS by Klepczarek).

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