



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree
in Language Sciences

Final Thesis

Plurilingual Acquisition of Language: Early vs Late Bilingualism Comparison

**The Bilingual Advantages from a Cognitive and Intercultural / Relational point of
view at a Social, Academic and Working Level**

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Graziano Serragiotto

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Monica Banzato

Graduand

Francesca Fruner

854969

Academic Year

2018 / 2019

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor Graziano Serraggiotto and co-supervisor Monica Banzato for their useful comments, remarks and engagement through the learning process of this master thesis. Furthermore, I would like to thank all the participants in my survey, who shared their precious time during the process of collecting data.

Finally, I wish to thank my family and closed ones for their everlasting, unconditional support, love and encouragement throughout my study.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis on “Plurilingual Acquisition of Language: Early vs Late Bilingualism Comparison. The Bilingual Advantages from a Cognitive and Intercultural / Relational point of view at a Social, Academic and Working level” is that to demonstrate the underneath bilinguals’ advantages over monolingual people and, specifically, those of the so-called “early” bilinguals over the “late” ones.

In order to establish such claim, we used an Online Questionnaire as an instrument of investigation among 34 early and late bilingual / plurilingual people.

To these ones, hence, 35 questions covering the overall theory on bilingualism’s research have been submitted, such as *the process of language acquisition, the different typologies of bilingualism and its main characteristics, the false myths inherent to it and the different typologies of advantages caused by such condition.*

Nonetheless, the results emerging from the Data Analysis confirmed our expectations and, precisely, highlighted some fundamental points, such as: the prevalence of late bilinguals / plurilinguals in today’s society, the overall bilinguals’ minor difficulties in learning subsequent languages, thus having major possibilities at all levels of society plus a positive influence on education / school achievement / professional career and, in conclusion, the major advantages experienced by early bilinguals (over late bilinguals) at all cognitive / intercultural / relational / social / academic and working levels.

Introduction

It seems clear to us that, nowadays, the world is largely populated by plurilingual individuals, due to multiple facts and phenomena regarding society and human evolution in general.

To know one and only language, which is one's own "mother tongue", has definitely assumed a different meaning in terms of personal, social and professional capacities, compared to a few decades ago. The world of today, indeed, is a multilingual and multicultural conglomerate of individuals, whose need and will to communicate with one another, for specific or basic reasons, must be supported and endured by an efficient linguistic and communication knowledge.

Starting from this claim, we understand how important it is to support the field of bilingualism and plurilingualism, that is the acquisition process of two or more languages simultaneously or in subsequent processes, carried on by an individual at different stages of their life. Critical periods of language acquisition are obviously relevant and critically important in the outcome of this process, and will be discussed later on.

In order to describe and explain how a bilingual / plurilingual acquisition process must take place, we need to start from the basic concept of language acquisition: overall, anybody can learn one or more languages. As a matter of fact, this ability of ours seems to be dictated by some genetic components of our human essence, which distinguishes us from all the other species. This argument is reported by Edith Harding and Philip Riley (1986), who state that "with the exception of a severely handicapped minority, all children learn at least one language" (Harding, Riley, 1986: 18) and, specifically, they go through predictable stages, that are the stage of silence, production attempt and grammaticalisation. Moreover, it has been studied and discovered that this innate ability does not only involve one's own mother tongue, but also other languages. It can be referred to as a linguistic ability which concerns the use and application of the "Universal Grammar".

As far as the mechanisms of this process of language acquisition are concerned with, two debates are still on the go: the two main lines of controversy are the one taken by the "structuralists", who see the child's acquisition as an independent construction of grammar and grammatical rules taken from the world's inputs; and the other one by the

“functionalists”, who consider the child’s language as a construction given by all the meanings provided to them from the linguistic community.

When acquiring a language, moreover, the so-called “critical period” of acquisition has a central role. This phenomenon, which, according to Graffi and Scalise (2002) “è una fase nella vita di un organismo in cui questo presenta una spiccata sensibilità agli stimoli esterni che sono necessari allo sviluppo di una determinata abilità. Se l’organismo non riceve lo stimolo appropriato durante questo periodo critico, diventa difficile o addirittura impossibile sviluppare l’abilità in questione”¹ (Graffi, Scalise, 2002: 291), has a strict correspondence to the *age factor*: this explains the reasons according to which small children seem to learn any language reaching a mother tongue capacity / level while, on the other hand, the more one grows and becomes an adult, the harder it will be to learn an L2 / FL efficiently, due to many reasons, such as brain plasticity.

This phenomenon, finally, links to the dimension of bilingualism / plurilingualism and therefore the process of acquisition of two or more languages together. Despite much controversy, it seems that people who learn two or more languages as a mother tongue have cognitive, intellectual and social advantages over monolinguals for a variety of reasons.

As a matter of fact, “it seems that the language acquisition process is the same in its basic features and in its developmental sequence for the bilingual child and the monolingual child” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 49), with the difference that “the bilingual child has the additional task of distinguishing the two language systems. (...) Thus, bilingualism does not require any special mental processes, but only an extension and refinement of those common to all language speakers.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 49)

In conclusion, as it is declared in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1965), we can affirm that “the mastery of two or more languages – bilingualism or multilingualism – is a special skill” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 22), which must be promoted inside and outside families. Consequently, to raise a child bilingually is definitely a good manoeuvre in shaping a highly motivated and resourceful individual in today’s world.

¹ “it is a phase in the life of an individual in which this one presents a strong sensitivity to external stimuli that are necessary for the development of a certain ability. If the individual does not receive the appropriate stimulus during this critical period, it becomes difficult or even impossible to develop that specific skill”

1. Language Acquisition (L1, L2 / FL)

1.1. Mother tongue, Second Language and Foreign Language

Before entering into the details of the bilingual / plurilingual acquisition process, we need to identify what an L1, L2, and a FL are.

L1 stands for one's own mother tongue, plus it is the national language of any country considered in the first place. One learns it through models, contexts, therefore through listening to people (family and surrounding people), speaking, reading and writing (later on developed abilities, once entering the school system).

The L2 is a non-native language which is studied by someone in a foreign country, whereas the FL is a language which is not present in the country where it is being studied by someone.

In general, therefore, the main functional differences between the L2 and the FL are the following ones: as far as the L2 is concerned with, the individual is affected by *total* exposure to the language, the linguistic input can be found both inside and outside the school system, the learning process rhythm is sustained, fast, and the individual learning the language is highly motivated for various reasons which will be debated here shortly. On the other hand, as far as the FL is concerned with, the individual is affected by *partial* exposure to the language, the linguistic input is only found inside the school system (and given / implemented by the teacher's knowledge), the learning process rhythm is rather slower compared to the previous case, and the individuals, even though they are motivated in learning the language, need the figure of the teacher as a guide, mentor, and facilitator for their own language acquisition process.

All in all, there is a main differentiation in the acquisition of the two typologies of languages cited above (L2 / FL), which implies and delineates corresponding different outputs with respect to one's own linguistic skills: the concept of motivation. Learning a FL because one has to, because one is obliged at school by teachers or for simple and clear sense of duty and responsibility, does not and will not have the same effect if one learns an L2 because one *needs* it, or even better, because one *wants* it.

What emerges in a situation of L2, according to Balboni (2012), is the fact that “la motivazione è di solito immediata, strumentale, quotidiana, e mira all’integrazione nel paese in cui la lingua è parlata.”² (Balboni, 2012: 126)

Another case is the one of EL (*ethnic language*), which is the original language of a community which has emigrated to another country, but is still using that specific language. This circumstance is found in cities such as New York City, with the foundation of “sub-cities” such as *Little Italy* or *China Town*, where the belonging people continue speaking their own original (but old) languages: these, as a matter of fact, have remained “static”, thus have not changed according to the dynamic nature of languages, as it should be. In the US, especially, there is an ulterior differentiation between *family languages* (characterizing immigrant families in certain areas where no other immigrants with the same provenience live) and *community languages* (where the EL is also used outside the family, due to the presence of an extended immigrant community).

1.2. The Language Acquisition Process: Chomsky, Krashen and Pienemann

At this point, we need to acknowledge what the concept of “acquisition” refers to, and how this phenomenon, or better said process, takes place once learning a language.

As reported by Balboni (2012) in “Le sfide di Babele. Insegnare le lingue nelle società complesse”, “l’acquisizione è un processo inconscio che sfrutta le strategie globali dell’emisfero destro del cervello insieme a quelle analitiche dell’emisfero sinistro”³ (Balboni, 2012: 39); this process implies the permanent stabilisation of new information in the long-term memory: this is the base-foundation of any language acquisition process; without acquisition, one cannot learn a language. On the other hand, the process of *learning*, which in Italian is translated as *apprendimento*, concerns a rational process characterizing the left cerebral hemisphere, that does not involve a permanent

² “motivation is usually immediate, instrumental, daily-based, and it aims at the integration in the country where the language is spoken.”

³ “acquisition is an unconscious process that exploits the global strategies of the right hemisphere of the brain and the analytical ones of the left hemisphere”

acquisition of notions, but it is transient, thus not suitable for a stable and long-term language acquisition.

Therefore, we can consider the language acquisition process as a process characterized by *bimodality* and *directionality*: the first term refers to the fact that the two cerebral modalities (the global, simultaneous, analogic, emotional and visual one of the *right hemisphere* and the analytic, sequential, logic, rational and linguistic one of the *left hemisphere*) are both involved in the acquisition process of language; the second term refers to the cerebral flow of information (*input*), from the right, global, visual, contextual, situational and emotional hemisphere to the left, analytic, linguistic and rational hemisphere.

The consequence of such physiological cerebral characterization is that our human “natural” order of acquisition is composed of three implicational stages, namely *globalization*, *analysis* and *synthesis*.

Moreover, many studies have been made regarding this topic, starting from the one delineated by Chomsky, who hypothesized the existence of a LAD (*Language Acquisition Device*), supported by a LASS (*Language Acquisition Support System*).

As far as his hypothesis is concerned with, “il linguaggio, con cui pure non nasciamo (i neonati non parlano!), è parte del bagaglio che ereditiamo in quanto membri della specie umana, e non solo come cittadini di questa o quella comunità”⁴ (Graffi, Scalise, 2002: 279) and, as we have previously stated, every human being has a natural and instinctual ability / faculty to learn any language: this is part of our “human baggage”, which distinguishes us from any other existing species.

Moreover, according to Balboni (2012), three observations sustain the theory of human innate and genetically transmitted faculty of language acquisition:

- a) The child’s linguistic development follows similar and predictable stages, independently from the socio-cultural context where he or she is found. As a matter of fact, any child learning any language will follow the same predictable stages for his / her first 36 months of life, these being the stage of silence, production attempts and grammaticalisation.

⁴ “language, with which we are not even born (infants do not speak!), is part of the baggage we inherit as members of the human species, and not only as citizens of one community or another”

- b) This “natural order” of acquisition does not only concern one’s own mother tongue, but also other languages, independently of one’s own age.
- c) All existing languages undergo a “Universal Grammar”, pragmatically some common linguistic mechanisms, which prove the existence of a genetic pre-programmed language faculty.

At this stage, we need to introduce another study, made by Krashen and inspired by the previously described theory of Chomsky. Specifically, he has elaborated the SLAT (*Second Language Acquisition Theory*), as well as the distinction / opposition between the concepts of *acquisition* and *learning*, which were previously discussed.

This theory has a foundation in the concept of “*comprehensible input*”, expressed by the formula $i+1$, which stands for a message whose content and / or structures are located a bit over the level of an individual’s linguistic knowledge. Krashen claims that, if this input is comprehensible so that the individual can focus on it and not on its phonological, morpho-syntactic or textual form, the linguistic acquisition will take place. Moreover, this hypothesis also explains why some linguistic structures are acquired before others, according to their difficulty and frequency of use.

Along with this, the *Acquisitional Didactics* (Rastelli, 2009) theory claims that, in order to elaborate and interiorise new linguistic structures, the input must not only be *comprehensible* (Krashen, 1981), but also *processable*. This *Theory of Processability* (Pienemann, 1984; 1986) affirms that the grammatical development of the *interlanguage*, which will be discussed here after, gradually emerges as a consequence of the activation of 5 implicational procedures, namely: the lexical stage, the categorical stage, the syntagmatic stage, the phrasal stage and the inter-phrasal stage. This means that “la mente è disponibile ad imparare per prime le cose che richiedono meno sforzo cognitivo, ciò che è più “facile””⁵ (Balboni, 2012: 47), according not only to the correspondence between mother tongue and L2 / FL, simplicity or frequency, but also easiness in the input observation and usefulness for communication purposes.

1.3. The Development of L1 and L2 / FL

⁵ “the mind is willing to learn first things that require less cognitive effort, what is “easier””

1.3.1. L1 Acquisition

As Graffi and Scalise (2002) claim, children's *linguistic production* is just *one* aspect of their process of acquisition: as a matter of fact, they do have to learn how *to grasp* and *understand* language, first of all. We do not have evidence that the process of comprehension and production happen at the same exact moment, but we can assume from the data and observational analysis, that children are attracted and interested in words, especially those pronounced by their mothers, since birth (or even before that, during gestation).

As anticipated above, we have evidence that the *comprehension* process precedes the *production* process, according to both lexical and structural levels. This can also be explained by the fact that the child learns how to speak naturally, before entering the school system (therefore receiving an education), while he or she will have to wait until Primary School in order to learn how to *read* and *write*, (therefore developing his / her *production* abilities).

Although, it is not easy at all to investigate on children's linguistic abilities, since the first 6 months of their life are characterized by a *stage of silence*.

The new-born, compared to the adult, does not possess *memory* nor the ability to abstract and elaborate any kind of information. Moreover, he or she has never heard a first language before. Despite this disadvantage, the new-born will reach in just a matter of months such linguistic abilities that an adult could never reach nor overcome. This is mainly due to the fact that the new-born perceives many more phonological distinctions than the adult does, proceeding through a sort of "learning through forgetfulness". This also explains why an adult learning an L2 / FL will never acquire the phonological ability / L2/FL accent, maintaining its own mother tongue accent. (All this aspect will be discussed in the focus of this thesis, in the following chapters).

The child is thought to start producing language at around six-months of age, with the so-called *lallation* or *babbling*, even if it seems that he / she is able to recognize and remember words since the age of four-months old, therefore before even knowing their meaning.

At ten-months old, he / she starts to acquire words, and at the age of 1-year old a child is generally able to comprehend around 70 different words, even though his / her active

vocabulary is still confined to a very few units. From now on, the lexical acquisition process starts with a boost: the child needs to recognise, memorise words and to associate them to a specific meaning, therefore the first units that he / she will produce are the so-called “proto-words”, which, according to Graffi and Scalise (2002), are “associazioni stabili tra suono e significato, ma del tutto personali e comprese solo dalle persone che sono a più stretto contatto con il bambino.”⁶ (Graffi, Scalise, 2002: 286)

The acquisition process is initially slow: the child learns a maximum of ten words per month. Then, after he / she has learnt 50 words circa, a *lexical boost* takes place (around 19-21-months of age, on average), when they are said to be learning up to 9 words a day – 50 words a week. Nonetheless, during this whole process, children also make what are called “*semantic overextensions*”, namely some utilizations of the same words with respect to different and inappropriate contexts (which they do find acceptable).

Anyway, it is proved that “tutti i bambini che imparano una data lingua seguono uno sviluppo morfologico e sintattico prevedibile: esiste cioè una vera e propria sequenza invariabile di acquisizione di desinenze e parole funzionali. Può variare l’età in cui un singolo bambino raggiunge un determinato stadio, ma la sequenza degli eventi rimane senza dubbio la stessa.”⁷ (Graffi, Scalise, 2002: 290)

Basically, “according to Chomsky and others, there are universal (i.e. the same for all children regardless of language) principles built into the brain which allow the child to analyse the language it hears and to sort out the bits and pieces of information into a formal system of rules for understanding and producing language. Theories suggesting that the child is pre-programmed to learn language thus suggest that the basic principles for forming grammar exist in the brain, waiting to “unfold” as the child matures. Although the child must, of course, be exposed to language in order for it to develop, the role of adults and of the environment is seen as mainly activating that which is already present in the child.” (Arnberg, 1947: 49-50)

Moreover, it has been observed that “children cannot acquire vocabulary and grammar without exposure to models” (Arnberg, 1947: 52): as a matter of fact, they are

⁶ “stable associations between sound and meaning, but entirely personal and understood only by people who are in closer contact with the child.”

⁷ “all children who learn a certain language follow a predictable morphological and syntactic development: that is, there is a proper invariable sequence of acquisition of endings and functional words. The age at which a single child reaches a certain stage may vary, but the sequence of events undoubtedly remains the same.”

continuously bombarded with external linguistic stimuli which they will directly or indirectly imitate and replicate at a later stage through a process of “delayed imitation”.

Opposite to this vision of *outer reinforcement* is Noam Chomsky’s hypothesis, suggesting that “instead of language learning occurring because of factors in the outside environment, (...) children are born with the ability to learn language. Other arguments for an inborn ability are that children all over the world learn language at approximately the same age and seem to learn it in a similar manner.” (Arnberg, 1947: 49-50)

1.3.2. L2 / FL Acquisition

The acquisition process is slightly different when one has to learn an L2 or FL: as Harding and Riley (1986) claim in “The Bilingual Family. A handbook for parents”, “when we learn a first language we use it to acquire the notions, ideas and concepts which help us think. When we learn a second language, those notions and thoughts are already there and, for better or worse, are going to come between the learner and the new language. You cannot learn a first language twice.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 64) Therefore, we can already notice that *a second language is not learnt in the same way as the first one*, according to specific processes involved.

As a matter of fact, even though it seems that “there is a unity of process that characterises all language acquisition and (...) this unity of process reflect similar strategies of language acquisition” (McLaughlin, 1978), therefore, “despite interference from the first language, the learning techniques we adopt and the stages we pass through are similar in both cases” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 64), there is evidence of a so-called process of “transfer” position: in this case, all the elements we know from our first language are gradually replaced by new elements of the second language we want to acquire. This process gradually diminishes over time (once one’s own *interlanguage*, which will be discussed here shortly, increases in terms of proficiency and linguistic ability), and it is the obvious consequence of the influence of one’s own L1 knowledge on all levels of the L2.

Researchers such as Fillmore and Keller-Cohen, moreover, have attributed importance to the role of “social, cognitive and linguistic strategies used in acquiring a language in a natural environment” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 65). With respect to this, the child is seen in the first “interactional” stage, as trying to establish “social relationships with the speakers of the second language” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 65), thus relying on *fixed*

formulas and *non-verbal communication*. In the second stage, “the child concentrates on communicating and starts analysing the formulas which have up till then been learnt as wholes in order to build up new sentences with the elements” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 65), and finally, in the third stage, “the child checks systematically that the forms he / she uses are correct.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 65)

Overall, any second language is learnt through a process of implicational stages, and as Balboni (2012) claims, in order for something to be acquired, therefore stabilised in the long-term memory, this has to imply the presence of other previously acquired - elements (linguistic contents or structures), according to the logic of “*proximal development zone*”, or “*natural order*”.

In order to visualise the starting point of an L2 acquisition, we need to remind that, when one learns an L1, he / she does not depart from a condition equal to 0, but is provided with a “language instinct”, which is the fundamental feature of human nature. This characteristic, which is called “Universal Grammar” and is a proper “proto-grammar”, refers to “un insieme di conoscenze istintive che il bambino si deve limitare ad adattare e arricchire con i dati della lingua cui viene esposto.”⁸ (Graffi, Scalise, 2002: 293)

Therefore, once learning an L2, we can claim that the starting point of this process will be sustained by one’s own knowledge of its own L1, his / her own knowledge of the Universal Grammar, and the Universal Grammar itself mediated by the L1.

As a consequence, two situations can be delineated with respect to the L2 learner’s *behaviour* and *linguistic strategies*: if one learns an L2, using only his / her own knowledge of the L1 as a starting point in the acquisition process, he / she will make “*interference errors*”: these are inappropriate transfers / shifts of elements / grammatical rules from the L1 to the L2. On the other hand, if one starts from the same exact initial state (such as the Universal Grammar) peculiar to the children’s L1 acquisition, the errors made will likely be “*developmental errors*”: these ones would be similar, thus comparable, to those made in the acquisition of an L1.

At this stage we need to consider how the L2 learner *improves* and *proceeds* towards the L2, which can also be called *target language*. It is known that “l’apprendimento di L2 si

⁸ “a set of instinctive knowledge that the child must adapt and enrich with the data of the language to which he is exposed.”

configura come lo sviluppo di una serie di regole astratte, via via adattate, abbandonate, o rafforzate a mano a mano che aumentano i dati a disposizione degli apprendenti”⁹ (Graffi, Scalise, 2002: 294) and that this processing through implicational and subsequent stages is named “*interlanguage*”: this is a situation where the “steps”, the progresses made by the L2 learner constitute proper temporary languages, which seem sometimes “distant” to the target language according to some linguistic aspects, therefore in this sense considered as “wrong”, “misstructured”, even though they are not less coherent nor systematic compared to the target language.

The *interlanguage*, as a matter of fact, represents just a portion of the whole linguistic system of a native speaker, but not for this reason cannot be considered as a system by itself. According to Selinker, indeed, “l’interlingua è un sistema a sé, per quanto parziale: non è strutturato a caso, prodotto dell’input dell’insegnante nella lingua straniera o dell’ambiente nell’acquisizione spontanea ad esempio da parte di immigrati, è un sistema che ha le sue basi nella grammatica universale (patrimonio innato, che sottostà a tutte le lingue naturali), oltre che nella lingua materna (che comunque interferisce) e soprattutto nella lingua che si sta apprendendo.”¹⁰ (Balboni, 2012: 46)

The *interlanguage*, therefore, possesses its own “mechanisms”, such as the *generalisation* rule, on the base of which Italian past declinations such as “*aperto*” and “*prenduto*”, even if they are ungrammatical, still do make the *interlanguage* efficient for communication purposes.

As far as the errors in the process of *interlanguage* development are concerned with, there are two different opinions: the one supported by *chomskyan researchers*, claiming that it is the Universal Grammar which automatically guides the whole process, thus the errors are caused by fortuity, or by the limitedness of the learner’s memory. In this case the acquisition of a foreign language follows similar paths and mechanisms to those of the L1. On the other hand, *cognitivist researchers* note the differentiation between the

⁹ “the learning of L2 is configured as the development of a series of abstract rules, gradually adapted, abandoned, or strengthened as the data available to learners increase”

¹⁰ “*interlanguage* is a system by itself, however partial it is: it is not structured by chance, nor it is the product of the teacher’s input in the foreign language nor of the environment in the spontaneous acquisition, as in the case of immigrants; it is a system that has its bases in the universal grammar (innate heritage, which underlies all natural languages), as well as in the mother tongue (which in any case interferes) and above all in the language being learnt.”

spontaneous acquisition of an L1 and the *non-spontaneous* acquisition of an L2, where people already know what it means to know a language (and they do already know one language, their mother tongue), plus they know what they want to learn, because they have expectations and they know what they want to say. Therefore, as a consequence, they apply *strategies*, they *act* and they *compare* their L1 to the L2 they are currently learning, thus making interference errors: in this circumstance, though, compared to the previous case, the learner is able to understand, even with the help of a facilitator, that he / she is making such errors, therefore he / she can overcome them.

Even though anybody can learn one or more languages, it is true that some people seem to be “*better at learning*” than others. There is no univocal explanation to this phenomenon, but it is possible, as Graffi and Scalise (2002) affirm, that this is due to a neurolinguistic component, as well as other factors of different nature, such as affective, psychological and sociological components.

Moreover, if one has to learn a *third*, or *forth language*, the situation is once more slightly different. Indeed, the acquisition of an L3 / L4 / etc. “*does* affect the languages already mastered by an individual. Initial results on third languages indicate that there are, inter alia, accelerating feedback effects. It was observed, for example, that when new languages (third, fourth, etc.) are acquired, one of the languages serves as an auxiliary language, promoting intercomprehension. On the other hand, neurobiological research demonstrates that, depending upon the age at which the second language is acquired, the basis of the third language is drawn upon, if the second language was acquired before the age of three. If a second and third language are acquired later (after age 9), they form their own networks together, separate from that of the first language (Wattendorf et al. 2001).” (Aronin, Hufeisen, 2009: 52)

1.4. The Goal of Language Acquisition: Communicative Competence

To know a language, whether it is an L1, an L2, or a FL, means to possess a *communicative competence*: this is a complex competency, which is characterized by different abilities:

- a) *To know how to do language*: a “deep-level” ability, it means to know the morpho-syntax, lexical, textual structures, etc. Therefore, (Balboni, 2012: 26-27), to know how to comprehend, produce and manipulate texts as well.

- b) *To know how and what to do with the language*: to know how to translate linguistic functions into pragmatic acts which have an effect in reality.
- c) *To know the language*: to know the grammar, the phonetics, the orthography, etc. Specifically, according to Balboni (2012, 26-27), it is the ability to comprehend and produce well-formed statements from the phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, textual point of view.
- d) *To know the non-verbal language*: to know the kinesics, the proxemics, etc. Therefore, (Balboni, 2012: 26-27), the ability to understand and produce expressions and gestures of the body (kinesic competence), to evaluate the communicative impact of interpersonal distance (proxemic competence), to use and recognize the communicative value of objects (objectification) and clothing (vestemic).

Moreover, as Balboni (2012) affirms, according to the communicative competence model, language can be considered as a medium to obtain goals, a social-relationship medium, an indicator of group membership, an expression of a specific culture (therefore an instrument in order to hand it down from generation to generation), a medium of thought, conceptualisation, expression and communication, etc.

Austin and Searle as well, focus not on “how the language is made”, but on “what the language does”, “what language is used for”, and the obvious answer to this hypothesis is that language is to act socially and pragmatically, and to communicate.

Linguistic competence by itself, therefore, does not guarantee communicative competence, which requires extralinguistic and sociocultural components as well.

1.5. Critical Periods in Language Acquisition and Poverty of the Stimulus

A crucial aspect influencing the success of one’s own linguistic acquisition (both of L1 and L2 / FL) is that of “*critical period*”. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, a critical period is a stage in the life of an individual, in which he or she is more sensitive to external inputs, which are as a consequence interiorised in his / her memory in order to acquire new knowledge (in this case, linguistic ability / skills / knowledge in general). On the other hand, there are other stages in the life of the individual which are

not suitable for acquiring new languages, mainly due to biological factors, such as brain plasticity just to cite one of them.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to deduce that the *age factor* is extremely correlated to that of *critical period* (which is even tested with comprehension and production tests): indeed, as Graffi and Scalise (2002) claim in “Le lingue e il linguaggio. Introduzione alla linguistica”, the later a child is exposed to language, the worse will he / she learn his / her L1; analogously, this situation can happen with respect to the acquisition of an L2. In general, though, one’s competence in his / her own L1 will always be higher than that in the L2.

As a consequence, two critical periods are thought to exist in the life of an individual: after the first one (which approximately terminates around 5 years of age), it becomes difficult to acquire an L1; after the second one (at the end of puberty), it gets hard to acquire an L2 / FL. It is demonstrated by evidence, as a matter of fact, that after puberty it is extremely hard that an individual would learn an L2 as a mother tongue, especially as far as the accent is concerned with: this is due to neurophysiological changes. Other researches have also demonstrated that the “end” of this critical period does not happen drastically, but gradually and progressively.

Anyway, it is possible to acquire new languages at every stage of life: what does change, though, is the level of *proficiency* one can reach, in terms of *rapidity of acquisition* and *phonetic sensibility*. With respect to this, we can cite Lenneberg (1967), whose hypothesis on the *critical period* and *biological fundamentals of language* considers the fact that “l’acquisizione del linguaggio, sia che si tratti della lingua madre, sia che ci si riferisca all’acquisizione di una seconda lingua, avviene in maniera ottimale e automatica nei primi anni di vita e identifica la pubertà come periodo oltre il quale non sarebbe più possibile acquisire una competenza linguistica pari a quella di un monolingue.”¹¹ (Bonifacci, 2018: 45)

What emerges from these data is that children are advantaged in the process of language acquisition, since they are experiencing an unrepeatably moment, the “maximum” stage of the critical period, according to *rapidity* and *phonetic sensibility* levels.

¹¹ “language acquisition, whether it is the mother tongue or whether it refers to the acquisition of a second language, takes place optimally and automatically in the first years of life and identifies puberty as a period beyond which it would no longer be possible to acquire a linguistic competence equal to that of a monolingual.”

This critical period, specifically, according to Balboni (2012: 92), is articulated in multiple sub-stages, namely:

- a) a first critical period, up to 3 years old, when one acquires perfect pronunciation and develops excellent linguistic abilities;
- b) a second critical period, between 4 and 8 years old, when the acquisition of the pronunciation is still perfect, but the cerebral effort in order to speak in the L2 / FL is stronger;
- c) a sensible period, between 8 and 20-22 years old, when the individual is still characterised by strong neurological potentials which allow him / her to develop a rather good linguistic competence, even though his / her *performance* will not pass as a mother tongue's anymore. As a matter of fact, the more one grows up, the stronger the mother tongue accent and the morpho-syntactic interference will be. This difficulty does not concern the lexical acquisition though.

From these observations, it seems that the child only can successfully learn an L2 / FL. From recent psycholinguistic studies, though, even the adult has started to be considered as someone who is able to learn other languages, especially due to his / her fundamental psychological characteristic which is his / her *metalinguistic need*. This characteristic, for instance, which is not that strong in the child nor in the adolescent's psyche, "deriva dalla superiore capacità astrattiva e sistematizzante della mente adulta, nonché dal desiderio di "regole" stabili a cui fare riferimento."¹² (Balboni, 2012: 101)

Even though, it still remains the fact that "many adults learning a second language often state that they feel like actors and actresses when speaking the language, i.e. that the language somehow does not feel "a part of them". Such a feeling naturally influences a person's motivation to use and learn a second language because communication is not experienced as being as rewarding as when the mother tongue is used. Although little has been investigated concerning the role of emotional factors in learning a second language, one argument why young children may more easily be able to "develop a feeling" for the second language is because learning in young children occurs in a more "holistic" fashion than it does for the older learner, in which emotions are strongly integrated with the child's learning. In contrast, it is often claimed that older learners and adults learn a second language in a more analytic way." (Arnberg, 1947: 80-81)

¹² "derives from the superior abstracting and systematizing capacity of the adult mind, as well as from the desire for stable "rules" to refer to."

Moreover, “research on the influence of age on the acquisition of second and additional languages has important implications for multilingual education when making decisions about instruction of different languages and through different languages in the curriculum. There is the popular idea that children pick up languages more easily than adults and that “the earlier the better” is the right strategy for language learning.” (Aronin, Hufeisen, 2009: 127)

In conclusion, as Graffi and Scalise (2002: 277-278) affirm, children learn how to speak their language in a relatively short period, without being given explicit instruction and following the same route and stages, regardless of the context of acquisition and of which language they are learning.

Therefore, a child learns how to use language in just a matter of a couple of years, even before entering the school system, without putting too much attention on it. On the other hand, an adult, even if he / she is rather skilled with languages, will never reach an equal linguistic level such as the child’s one. He / she will most likely spend years of studying, attempting to keep his / her motivation active and strong, activating learning strategies of different types in order to complete exercises and tasks, always under the guide of a teacher or facilitator. Unfortunately, he / she will always have a foreign accent and will make errors of many sorts, thus feeling at times “out of place” and not confident in speaking the L2 / FL.

All these information can be explained by the concept of *poverty of the stimulus*: even if the stimulus during the child’s linguistic acquisition seems poor, disturbed, variable and discontinuous, he / she will still develop his / her language in a rapid and solid way. The child, unlike the adult, does not proceed through attempts and errors while learning language, but he / she seems to follow an autonomous and predetermined path, regardless of what he / she is being told by surrounding people.

2. Bilingualism and Plurilingualism

2.1. What is “Bilingualism”: Definitions and Related Concepts

We all know what “bilingualism” means, in general terms, but we do need to go into the details in order to discover the multiple facets characterizing this “state of being” of the majority of the world’s population.

First of all, it is evident that a *bilingual individual* differs from a *monolingual* one, as well as from a *plurilingual* one. As Charlotte Kemp defines in her essay “Defining Multilingualism”, “bilinguals are often described as persons who use two languages, and bilingualism is “the ability to speak two languages” or “the habitual use of two languages colloquially.”” (Aronin, Hufeisen, 2009: 14) These individuals, therefore, differentiate from the so-called “*monolingual*” ones who “are individuals who use one language and may be proficient at using a number of different varieties of the language together with different registers in the variety of varieties they know, and of switching between varieties and between registers in the appropriate context” (Aronin, Hufeisen, 2009: 13) and *multilingual* ones, who are “a person who has “the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing.”” (Aronin, Hufeisen, 2009: 15) These last ones, in particular, are also referred to as “polyglots”, and their specific trait is that of utilizing more than two languages (with each having a different degree of proficiency / control / estimated fluency), according to the context, their own level of proficiency, their purposes, etc.

Therefore, in order to clarify this complex “situation” / concept characterizing a good amount of the world’s population (if not the major, as claimed at the beginning of the chapter), many studies and researchers have attempted to give a more specific definition to this phenomenon, which cannot be limited to the basic assumption of “*knowing two languages*”. Some of these definitions, which we can cite here after, are:

- a) “*Bilingualism (is) native-like control of two languages (...)* Of course, one cannot define a degree of perfection at which a good foreign speaker becomes a bilingual: the distinction is relative. (L. Bloomfield, 1933)” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 23)
- b) “*The phenomenon of bilingualism (is) something entirely relative (...)* We shall therefore consider bilingualism as the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual. (W. F. Mackey, 1962)” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 23)

- c) *“Bilingualism is understood (...) to begin at the point where the speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language. (E. Haugen, 1953)” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 23)*
- d) *“Bilingualism is an optional or obligatory means for efficient two-way communication between two or more different “worlds” using two different linguistic systems. (Van Overbeke, 1972)” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 23)*
- e) *“In many places, people speak two dialects. When these are officially recognised as languages, we say that such people are “bilingual”, but in purely linguistic terms anyone who has two different forms of speech available is bilingual.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 12)*
- f) *“The mastery of two or more languages – bilingualism or multilingualism – is a special skill. Bilingualism and multilingualism are relative terms since individuals vary greatly in types and degrees of language proficiency. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1965)” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 22)*
- g) *“Over half of the world’s population is bilingual. This fact is usually surprising to many Europeans, who are under the impression that living with two or more languages is exceptional.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 27)*

As we can see from the previous definitions, it is not simple to state what the concept of “bilingualism” refers to. In order to do that, many variables and circumstances need to be taken into account, such as: “descriptors which refer to the degree of bilingualism, to the context of bilingual language acquisition, to age of acquisition, to the domain of use, to social orientation.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 4)

As far as the *degree of bilingualism* is concerned with, this has to be linked to the dimension of linguistic proficiency. In other words, the *“degree of bilingualism* refers to the levels of linguistic proficiency a bilingual must achieve in both languages to be considered a bilingual.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 5)

Once again, there is no absolute and single answer to such phenomenon: a bilingual could be an individual whose language A knowledge corresponds to his / her language B knowledge in terms of proficiency, being this last one high, therefore correspondent to a C2 (mother tongue or “native”) level. But it could also be an individual whose language A knowledge is lower or higher than his / her language B knowledge. In other words, there is no specific proficiency level to which one can attribute the “bilingual trait” to one individual’s linguistic knowledge.

As Bee Chin and Wigglesworth (2007) affirm, “like the general public, experts differ among themselves on this issue, and in many ways the disparities between their views have been seminal in spawning an active debate on how bilingualism should be defined.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 5) As a consequence, a sort of *scale* according to such “*degree of bilingualism*” one must have in order to be classified as a “bilingual individual” has been delineated.

With respect to this, we can cite Bloomfield (1933), who “defined bilingualism as “native-like control of two languages” (Bloomfield, 1933: 55), while, in contrast, Mackey (1962: 52) defined bilingualism as “the ability to use more than one language”. In a similar vein to Mackey, Weinreich (1953) defined bilingualism as the “practice of alternatively using two languages” while Haugen (1953: 7) proposed “the point where a speaker can first produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language’ to be a starting point for defining bilingualism.”” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 5)

Moreover, according to Macnamara (1969), the degree of bilingualism is to be considered in relation to the competency in determined sub-components as well. These ones correspond to the four human macro-skills such as *speaking, writing, reading* and *listening*, which are developed at different stages of life, and that also attain different linguistic competence goals / outcomes. As a matter of fact, it is highly unlikely that an individual, even a monolingual one (it is a concern of everyone, regardless of the languages known or not known) can reach the same level competencies in all four macro-abilities: for instance, the writing ability is not extremely important for someone (with the exception of those working in the field of research or journalism, etc.) whose only aim is to communicate in his / her own mother tongue. With respect to an L2 / FL environment, moreover, along with the case of bilingualism / plurilingualism, this instance is even more visible: the so-called *receptive abilities* will be the ones developed and exploited first, while the *productive abilities* will be developed only later, and will not always reach a high level of proficiency. Specifically, “a person’s receptive (or hearing) vocabulary is the number of words he or she *understands*. (All people have a larger receptive vocabulary than an active vocabulary, i.e. they know more words than they actually use.)” (Saunders, 1988: 144)

Therefore, even though the general opinion is that “to designate a bilingual as someone who can read, write, and speak fluently in more than one language, and without fluency

in all three aspects, would not be called a bilingual” (Altarriba, Heredia, 2008: 3), we now know that this is not the real case.

A child of immigrants, for example, could only develop receptive skills in his / her own family language, but not the productive ones, since that L1 will not be spoken outside their home, therefore it will not be sufficiently practiced and developed. However, as far as the official language of their country of residence (therefore his / her L2) is concerned with, he / she will most likely develop all four macro-abilities at a rather good proficiency level, since he / she will use it in multiple domains and contexts, such as school, playgrounds, etc. “Mari Haas (1953) would class such children as “receiving oral bilinguals”, since they are bilingual only in receiving the spoken form of two languages, in listening comprehension. Someone who is bilingual in all four skills would, using this system, be classified as a “receiving sending oral visual bilingual.” (Saunders, 1988: 8)

However, situations may vary depending on families, communities, and in general, internal and external factors, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

To conclude, we know that, as Graffi and Scalise (2002) affirm, “oltre la metà dell’umanità è bilingue, nel senso che parla correntemente due lingue nazionali”¹³ (Graffi, Scalise, 2002: 296), thus, for this reason, the understanding of the dimension of bilingualism / plurilingualism should not only account for its cognitive / linguistic competency factors, but also “for how bilinguals utilize and interact with the resources in the community.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 3) As a matter of fact, “the impact of social, psychological and cultural variables on the bilingual individual is ultimately central to the experience of being bilingual, and an understanding of these factors underpins all questions raised in this area of study.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 3)

2.2. The Bilingual / Plurilingual Acquisition Process

At this point, we need to describe the process of bilingual / plurilingual acquisition, that is, not the acquisition of one and only language (L1, L2 / FL), but of two or more languages together, at the same time or in subsequent stages.

As Graffi and Scalise explain in “Le lingue e il linguaggio. Introduzione alla linguistica” (2002), it is general opinion / common knowledge that it is an extremely

¹³ “over half of humanity is bilingual, in the sense that it speaks two national languages fluently”

hard job to learn two or more languages together, and that, due to its difficulty, this process is definitely not suitable for children nor adolescents. As a consequence, as it is evident in the Italian public school system, linguistic education is not always considered a necessity until the first years of Secondary School, (*Scuole Medie*). The reason behind this political choice is based on the prejudice that the child is not able to learn an L2, until he / she has established a fully developed knowledge of his / her own L1.

On the base of such prejudice, (which has now been demolished by numerous counter-arguments in bilingualism research on the advantages of being bilingual / plurilingual), many immigrant families were asked to *not teach* their L1 (original, national language) to their children, since this would have affected their L2 (official language of the country of residence) learning outcomes.

As we know, nowadays, the reality of such phenomenon is quite different: children who learn two languages at the same time seem not to be confused by this “linguistic mix”; even more, they are not even delayed in the language acquisition process compared to their L1 colleagues / peers.

What is important to note here, is the main differentiation between monolinguals and bilinguals: these last ones, compared to the first ones, have to develop a *double linguistic knowledge*, comprehending both lexicon and grammatical structures. Therefore, if a child grows in a bilingual family where his / her mother is English and his / her father is Italian, he / she will probably learn couples of words at a time, such as *Apple / Mela, Cat / Gatto*, and so on. The so-called *linguistic mixing / transfers* and *code switching* will probably take place quite frequently, but this matter will be discussed in the following sub-chapter.

Therefore, “it seems that the language acquisition process is the same in its basic features and in its developmental sequence for the bilingual child and the monolingual child” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 49), the only difference being that the bilingual child, as previously said, has to distinguish two different language systems in order to learn them at the same time. This does not mean that the bilingual / plurilingual individual is characterised by some special mental process though; on the other hand, he / she will only have to “refine” and “extend” those linguistic mechanisms common to all language speakers (in this case, of monolinguals speaking their L1) to his / her L2 / L3 / etc.

Specifically, as Arnberg (1947) argues in “Raising children bilingually: The Pre-School Years”, there are “five explanations for how language development takes place” (Arnberg, 1947: 48), which are common to both L1 and L2 / FL, namely:

- a) “Outer reinforcement.
- b) Certain pre-programmed abilities.
- c) An active drive to structure the world, including language.
- d) Active interaction with care-givers and others.
- e) Imitation and modelling with and without complete understanding of that which has been imitated / modelled.” (Arnberg, 1947: 48)

Another case of debate is whether the child *mentally separates* the two or more languages from the very beginning, or after a period of time, after having learnt them as part of an *only* and *common linguistic system*. Indeed, as Harding and Riley (1986) claim, “there are two schools of thought regarding the separation of their two languages by bilingual children. There are those who think they go through an initial mixed stage and combine the two languages into one unified system and there are those who believe that they keep both languages separate from the moment they start talking.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 50)

Bee Chin and Wigglesworth (2007) also argument these positions by discussing the two different evidences of single or double / multiple systems of language: according to the single system, which “was empirically supported by examples of language mixing which were reported in early bilingual acquisition” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 46-47), they referred to Volterra and Taeschner’s (1978) three-stage model. Specifically, in this model the child is initially “unable to distinguish two different systems” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 46-47). Only later will he / she begin “with a single linguistic system which is gradually separated into two. In the first stage of the model, the child’s system consists of a single lexical system which includes words from both languages. (...) In the second stage of the model, the child separates the two lexicons, but maintains a single set of syntactic rules for both languages. In the third stage, the child has two different codes but associates each language with specific people – that is, the child demonstrates pragmatic differentiation of the two languages.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 46-47)

According to the second hypothesis, which considers the development of two or more linguistic systems as happening independently from one another, this is thought to take place at a very early age of the individual.

However, whether we take the position of the single or multiple linguistic system, we have a solid and common evidence which is that of *awareness*: in other words, it appears that the bilingual / plurilingual child is aware of being so (of his / her *bilingual condition*), already around 3 years of age. By doing so, he / she starts making comments regarding his / her multiple linguistic abilities (probably comparing him / herself to other monolingual people surrounding him / herself), thus using his / her multiple languages in correct, appropriate ways.

The concept of language awareness also helps us explain why “the bilingual child’s separation of the languages is a gradual process” (Arnberg, 1947: 69): as a matter of fact, “as the child becomes more and more aware of the presence of two languages in its environment, the languages become more and more separated.” (Arnberg, 1947: 69)

In order for this to happen, parents have a central role. Indeed, the more they talk with their children about the differences between the languages used inside and outside their home, along with the social experiences they might have with respect to the two or more languages used, the more will the children be aware of the potentiality they are carrying, namely that of knowing more than one language.

On the opposite side, if parents do not promote and give importance to the dimension of the *minority language* (of their origins therefore of their children’ as well), their offspring will most likely undergo a condition named “*passive bilingualism*”: they might be able to *understand* what they are being told by their parents in their L1, but not be able, or not be willing, in some cases, to reply and talk in that specific language. This implies, therefore, a sort of *receptive bilingualism*, which involves the use and exploitation of the only receptive ability of *listening*.

In general, although, all bilingual / plurilingual individuals (who share the knowledge of two or more languages) differentiate from one another according to the context of language acquisition. Some of them learn both (or more) languages at home, therefore since born, others outside the “home environment”, such as, for instance, at school, in a foreign country for working or studying purposes, etc.

Even more, as we have previously anticipated, *the age factor* is crucial in this acquisition process. Children who acquire both languages at home, therefore in a *primary context*, will receive a natural, non-structured input (*natural bilingualism*), while older individuals acquiring the other/s language/s outside the home, most likely at school, at a later stage of their life, will receive structured linguistic inputs, therefore developing a so-called *school bilingualism*.

As we have argued in the previous chapter, according to the so-called *critical periods*, “although exceptions and counterarguments have been reported, the bulk of the evidence points towards the advantage of early acquisition for ultimate language attainment.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 12) However, “the exact age in which the sensitive period operates is controversial, with Birdsong (2005) arguing that there is no clear cut-off point in terms of age at which native-like proficiency cannot be attained.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 12)

Therefore, still Bee Chin and Wigglesworth (2007) report that “generally, supporters of the sensitive age hypothesis (e.g. Newport 1990) argue that younger children can apply heuristic strategies which are more efficient than adult learners’. However, other researchers (e.g. Blaystok 1997a; Clark 2003) have cautioned that we should not look only at neurological factors when analysing language learning outcomes. In adult learners, other factors such as aptitude, attitude, identity and motivation can significantly affect the learning outcome. Attitudes and motivation, in particular, have been found to impact strongly on the final achievement of the learners’ proficiency level (e.g. Gardner 2001; Dornyei and Clément 2001; Masgoret and Gardner 2003). Apart from attitude, contextual factors such as exposure are also important.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 12-13)

All in all, there is evidence that “the degree to which the child will become a successful bilingual is determined by a number of variables” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 43-44), these being both individual and societal factors. Indeed, as we have previously discussed in the 1st chapter, it is proved that “all children with normal cognitive and physical functions will acquire the language of the family and community group they are born into, provided they have adequate exposure to the language, and have the opportunity for interaction in it.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 43-44)

Moreover, according to Meisel (2004), “bilinguals rarely use their languages frequently in every domain of their social environment. Rather they use each of them for different purposes, in different contexts, and in communicating with different partners. Consequently, their abilities

and skills in using each of these languages reflect their preferences and needs in the multifaceted social context in which they interact with others.” (Meisel, 2004: 93)

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to delineate the main differences between the monolingual *homogeneous* group of people and the bilingual / plurilingual *heterogeneous* one. As far as the linguistic input the first group receives is concerned with, we see that:

- a) “It consists of one language only.
- b) Both parents speak the language to the child.
- c) The language of the community around them is the same as the language spoken at home.
- d) When they enter into formal childcare and / or educational institutions, the language they have learned is the one that is used in the institutional setting.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 44-45)

On the other hand, as far as the second group’s linguistic input is concerned with, “bilingual or multilingual children will experience:

- e) Linguistic input that consists of more than one language.
- f) Each parent speaking a different language to them.
- g) The language of the community differing from either one or both of the languages they speak at home.
- h) The language in formal childcare and / or educational institutions not being one of the languages to which they have been exposed.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 44-45)

2.3. Code-Mixing and Code-Switching

It is not unusual that sometimes bilingual / plurilingual individuals make what is called “*code-switching*”, a particular mechanism which we will discuss here after but that, first of all, needs to be differentiated from the other mechanism of “*code-mixing*”.

While Hymes defines just one these terms, specifically that of code-switching, which according to him is “a common term for alternative use of two or more languages,

varieties of a language or even speech styles” (Ping, 2006: 4), Bokamba (1989), on the other hand, delineates and points out the two different types of mechanisms, such as: “code-switching is the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub)systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event (...) Code-mixing is the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from a cooperative activity where the participants, in order to infer what is intended, must reconcile what they hear with what they understand.” (Ping, 2006: 4)

In general, evidence and research make it possible to associate *code-mixing* with childhood, and *code-switching* with adulthood. Starting from Cantone’s (2007) “*Code-switching in Bilingual Children*” volume, which affirms that “language mixing in children, in contrast to adult’s code-switching, has to be interpreted as evidence for confusion in the bilingual’s language acquisition, in the sense that the two languages are not acquired separately, but start out as a single system” (Cantone, 2007: 2), we can acknowledge the main differentiations between these two similar but at the same time functionally distant mechanisms.

As Arnberg (1947) affirms, “language mixing refers to the young child’s mixing of both languages within the same utterance *before* the child is really aware of having two languages in its environment” (Arnberg, 1947: 27), while “code switching, on the other hand, refers to a conscious and / or purposeful switching of the two languages. This may consist of either inserting a word or phrase from the other language within an utterance or switching languages at the sentence boundary.” (Arnberg, 1947: 27)

Overall, whether we are in a situation of *code-mixing* or *code-switching*, these both indicate that we are analysing the linguistic production of one if not two or more bilingual / plurilingual individuals. Therefore, specific contexts, interlocutors’ attitudes, and interlocutors’ linguistic capacities themselves, will inevitably influence the choice of language use, according not only to correctness, fluency and pertinence, but also to code-mixing / code-switching occurrence.

Therefore, as Harding and Riley (1986) report in “The Bilingual Family. A handbook for parents”, “code-switching is a phenomenon which is limited to bilingual situations, where bilinguals talk to other bilinguals and where they can call upon the full communicative resources of both languages” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 57). Moreover, they claim that “the

more bilingual people are, the better they are at code-switching.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 57).

Another interesting point with respect to this phenomenon is *childhood-code-mixing*, and how parents consider this phenomenon according to their (children’s) language acquisition influences, in terms of inter-linguistic interferences and outputs. Although many seem discouraged from the idea of raising a child bilingually, mainly due to code-mixing evidence, thus considering it a major problem and source of confusion for the linguistic development of the child, it should be reminded to them that “as long as the parents are consistent, there is no evidence that code-switching has any adverse effects on the bilingual development of children.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 60)

This consideration proves the fact that one can switch between two or more languages, according to the other interlocutor’s linguistic competence, his / her own linguistic preference, his / her cognitive unconscious mechanisms (which stand at the base of language mixing), etc., without affecting the processing of the communication, nor his / her own inner linguistic / cognitive abilities.

Practically, as Saunders (1988) affirms in “Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens”, “switching may be due to a number of factors, both linguistic and extralinguistic” (Saunders, 1988: 11), thus speakers “may also switch languages for stylistic reasons, e.g. according to topic” (Saunders, 1988: 12-13), but also “much depends on the attitude of bilinguals towards language switching as to how much switching actually takes place in any interaction.” (Saunders, 1988: 12-13)

Another, and more specific type of code-switching which “is what Michael Clyne (1972: 24) calls “internally conditioned switching”, is switching caused by linguistic factors. The occurrence of a word which belongs to, or at least appears to belong to both languages (e.g. a proper noun such as Canberra) causes a speaker to forget momentarily which language he or she is speaking, and he or she continues in the other language, until it is realized what has happened.” (Saunders, 1988: 12-13)

Overall, although, leaving out all the specific sub-differentiations between the various types of code-switching / code-mixing, the main common reasons which generate these mechanisms, according to some researchers, are:

- a) “A lack of a vocabulary item in one of the languages.
- b) Certain activities having been experienced in only one of the languages.

- c) Certain words being simpler, more salient, or more accessible in one of the languages.
- d) To clarify a misunderstanding.
- e) To create a certain communication effect.
- f) As a continuation of the last language used (i.e. “triggering effect”).
- g) To emphasize a point.
- h) To express a group solidarity.
- i) To exclude someone from the conversation.” (Arnberg, 1947: 27)

In conclusion, it seems evident that the analysis of this phenomenon is fundamental for research purposes, since it “provides crucial material for our understanding of how language is both comprehended (processed) in the brain, and produced.” (Gardner-Chloros, 2009: 5) As a matter of fact, it is only due to such analysis that “we can find out which combinations of words or morphemes from different languages can easily be combined and which are more resistant, or perhaps even impossible.” (Gardner-Chloros, 2009: 5) Finally, as Romaine (1995) states, code-switching facilitates the understanding and visualisation, in the Linguistic environment, of “the division of labour between grammar and lexicon.” (Romaine, 1995)

2.4. Bilingualism / Plurilingualism Inside and Outside the Family

Taking the perspective of a child’s learning of two or more languages, therefore in a *naturalistic / primary environment*, the roles of the family, along with the people who surround the bilingual / plurilingual individual, are extremely important and influential with respect to his / her own linguistic outputs.

First of all, we have to assume that the majority of the people of today are bilinguals, if not plurilinguals. As a consequence, families around the world will be bilingual / plurilingual as well. There might exist different kind of familiar structures, such as, for example, “Parent 1 = English / Parent 2 = English / Official Language (of the Country of Residence) = Italian” or “Parent 1 = English / Parent 2 = Spanish / Official Language (of the Country of Residence) = Italian” and so on, with parents’ mother tongue and official languages of the country of residence varying according to the context.

What is important to note here, is the process whereby one's own (parents' in this case) linguistic background can be transmitted to the next generation (parents' offspring), according to their degree of proficiency and efficacy in today's society.

Therefore, evidence shows that while some families achieve excellent results according to "*linguistic transmission*", others do not, for various reasons. As Saunders (1988) affirms in "Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens", "in some cases they simply do not try to do so; they see little point in their children speaking any language other than the language of the new country, since that is where they will be living and growing up. (...) In other cases parents do wish to pass their language on their children, but are discouraged by the seeming impossibility of doing so." (Saunders, 1988: 3)

Another important factor influencing the success of language shift is the amount of *motivation* and *commitment* parents put in such an action. They might be driven by their own personal feelings towards the country the whole family is living in, as well as towards the official language spoken outside their home. In this instance, the family-language not being the one spoken in the outside society can result in a two-type consequence: the parents might want to preserve their own mother tongue therefore they start teaching it to their offspring since born (therefore speaking it with them in all contexts, inside and outside home); on the other hand, they might see their own mother tongue as useless towards their offspring's integration in the new society they are living in (we are talking about immigrant families, in these examples). This second option might be influenced by external factors and people, such as their children's teachers, or institutions in general, which lead them to believe "that they will best serve their children's interests if they attempt to speak only the dominant language of the community in the home. The assumption is that the more of this language the children hear, the sooner they will become competent in it; speaking another language in the home would only reduce exposure to and hinder acquisition of the dominant language." (Saunders, 1988: 35)

This of course may create some problems in the children's confidence with respect to speaking their parents' mother tongue, as will be discussed later on.

As far as the influences from outside the family are concerned with, these can derive from multiple people / situations: as it was said before, this unacceptance / intolerance towards bilingualism / plurilingualism may start from school (which is paradoxical, since schools should promote different knowledges and intelligences!), but also from

medical personnel claiming that some problems such as speech impairment, stuttering, or dyslexia might derive from a condition of bilingualism / plurilingualism, etc.

Sadly, this overall general behaviour / opinion towards bilingualism / plurilingualism leads to many hard-facing situations for such children who know more than one language and who would like to express themselves according to the context, utilizing one linguistic structure or another. As a consequence, “when bilingual children have difficulty in expressing themselves in one of their languages and have to grope for words or struggle with various grammatical constructions, resulting in a certain amount of repetition and hesitation, it is quite possible that this will attract the attention or even arouse the impatience of listeners and perhaps be considered stuttering. The children’s self-consciousness and anxiety about their speech, or more exactly, about listeners’ possible negative reactions to it, are the most likely causes of such disfluency, or at least the causes of its becoming a problem.” (Saunders, 1988: 102)

One possible solution to this phenomenon, which should never be taken, is the removing of the child’s family language: this action, most likely, would increase his / her anxiety, given that the “familiar, secure” family language would not be present and accepted by the society anymore. Moreover, it would not even promote any improvement in the fluency of the other, official language spoken in the country of residence.

In conclusion, as Saunders (1988) affirms, “this sort of antagonism seems to be based on the mistaken belief that the children’s acquisition of, and competence in the majority language, and hence their overall level of participation in school affairs will be improved by outlawing the language of the home. Besides not being supported by research evidence, this view again entirely ignores the harmonious functioning of the family unit. In such cases, firm action should be taken by parents to protect the interests of their children. Even antagonistic teachers will usually tone down their views in the face of strong protests from determined parents.” (Saunders, 1988: 103)

Hence, we should empower everybody’s consciousness that “the realization of being bilingual *is* something special and an achievement to be proud of is a significant weapon against any antagonism from peers.” (Saunders, 1988: 113)

Moreover, we should definitely not forget that it is not only the sole external factors which influence the establishment of bilingualism / plurilingualism in a family, but also the internal ones: these can originate from the erroneous parents’ conception of *what*

being bilingual means (they might think that their child should be *equilingual* in both / more languages they know), but also from the child's *reluctance* itself to speak in his / her parents' language (thus not the dominant one, with respect to the community).

Therefore, "when children for some reasons show reluctance to speak the language of their parent(s) or begin to interlard their speech with numerous lexical items from the dominant language of the community, it would seem that the problem can be successfully overcome provided that parents are persistent, yet show understanding and good humour. In this, the children's individual personalities obviously have to be taken carefully into account. It is important that the language does not assume any negative connotations for the children." (Saunders, 1988: 126)

Moreover, as far as the *cultural dimension* is concerned with, Grosjean (1982) points out that "if the two cultures are valued equally in the home, in the school and in the society at large and if biculturalism is judged to be as valuable as monoculturalism, then children and adolescents who are in contact with two cultures will accept both instead of rejecting or being rejected by one or the other or by both." (Grosjean, 1982: 166)

These *direct* and *indirect influences* towards the establishment of bilingualism / plurilingualism, in conclusion, should rise from various and different environments, such as school, public and private institutions, families, peer groups, etc. As Arnberg (1947) claims, indeed, "an important task for the future is thus to find ways of supporting bilingualism and biculturalism at all levels not only in the family but also in the pre-school and school, in various areas of working and professional life, and in society in general." (Arnberg, 1947: 17)

3. Types of Bilingualism

3.1. Simultaneous and Successive Bilingualism (Early and Late Bilingualism)

As we can predict, on the basis of the overall information provided in the previous chapter, there are many types of bilingualism, according to many factors, specifically: age of acquisition, degree of competence, modality of linguistic and cognitive elaboration, languages in social contexts, language use and exploitation.

Respectively, these factors link to specific and determinate kind of bilingualism (according to the sequence of order reported above): simultaneous and successive bilingualism (or early and late bilingualism), dominant or balanced bilingualism, coordinate – subordinate – sub-coordinate bilingualism, additive or subtractive bilingualism, passive – recessive bilingualism.

In this first sub-chapter, we will focus on the first type of bilingualism, which is that which distinguishes between the two types of *simultaneous* and *successive* bilingualism, or, analyzed under a slightly different perspective, *early* and *late* bilingualism.

First of all, we have to delineate what the adjectives *simultaneous* and *successive*, with respect to the dimension of bilingualism, refer to.

As Sander (2009) reports in “Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens”, “simultaneous means “at the same time”” (Sander, 2009: 5) and it refers to the child being exposed to both (or more) languages of the parents since birth. *Successive* bilingualism, on the other hand, “refers to a child acquiring one language first and adding another language later in childhood” (Ball, 2005: 166), therefore only after having developed and consolidated his / her linguistic competences in the L1, around the age of 3 years old.

As we have previously said, this kind of bilingualism, thus its inner differentiation, can also be interpreted in terms of *early* and *late* acquisition, if the age factor characterizing the bilingual / plurilingual individual is taken into account. As Bonifacci (2018) claims in “I bambini bilingui. Favorire gli apprendimenti nelle classi multiculturali”, the concept of early bilingualism can be seen as slightly different from the one of simultaneous bilingualism, since the child is not assumed as being exposed in similar if not equal modalities (amount of input) to both / multiple linguistic codes since birth.

What is important to note here is the age factor in relation to the child's first linguistic exposition, which must happen *before* the 3 years of age, namely when “le competenze linguistiche di base sono ancora in fase di acquisizione e consolidamento.”¹⁴ (Bonifacci, 2018: 20-23)

The distinction between *late* bilingualism and *successive* bilingualism, on the other hand, is not that clear and rigid, indeed these instances delineate quite similar concepts: the child is seen as being exposed to his / her L2, only after having consolidated his / her L1 linguistic competences.

The issue of age as delimitating the early – simultaneous and late – successive bilingualism has been object of debate up to our days, and does not seem to have found a “*meeting-point*” among researchers, who claim, anyway, that the age around 3-5 years old would state the distinction, therefore the point of transition, from an early and a late bilingualism development of an individual. As Ball (2005) claims in “Clinical Sociolinguistics”, “the reason for this age boundary is that younger learners tend to achieve a relatively higher level of language proficiency, in its global sense, than older learners. Nevertheless, research evidence indicates huge individual variations. Setting a rigid age boundary for the two types of bilingualism can only be arbitrary and has little scientific value.” (Ball, 2005: 166)

Moreover, *context* and *style* of acquisition are also important with respect to the differentiation between these two types of bilingualism. “Generally speaking, simultaneous bilingualism takes place very early in a child's life and in a naturally-occurring context without formal instruction. In other words, simultaneous bilingualism tends to happen in an unplanned fashion. Successive bilingualism, on the other hand, happens later in childhood and tends to involve formal teaching and learning, often in an educational setting and in a systematic and planned way.” (Ball, 2005 :166)

Therefore, accounting for the age factor as an “instrument” to define, and separate different stages of bilingual / plurilingual acquisition, we will report the following research-established bilingual stages, namely: *infant* bilingualism, *childhood* bilingualism, *adolescent* bilingualism and *adult* bilingualism. According to Chacon Beltran (2013), in the first two cases “the development of bilingualism takes place at the same time as the child's cognitive development whereas in the case of adolescent and adult

¹⁴ “basic language skills are still being acquired and consolidated”

bilingualism the cognitive representation of the word, to give an example, has already been completed, at least to a certain extent, and there is mainly a process of re-labelling previous concepts.” (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 98)

At this point, going back to the initial distinction between *simultaneous* and *successive* bilingualism, it seems essential to analyse, or at least describe the main points, of the two diverse typologies of linguistic development in such instances.

In the case of *simultaneous* bilingualism, there is no distinction between monolingual and bilingual / plurilingual acquisition of language. As we have discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, all children follow the same fundamental stages in L1 acquisition. Initially, they produce the so-called “lallation”, followed by the first proto-words and, at a later stage, the first “holophrastic phrases”, namely phrases composed by one and only word. What distinguishes monolingual from bilingual / plurilingual individuals, as has also been explained in the previous chapter, is that bilinguals / plurilinguals will inevitably have to create, therefore produce, a *two-system* linguistic knowledge, starting from the lallation stage as well. As Bonifacci states, therefore, “i bilingui simultanei, dunque, dalla nascita sono “sensibili” ai due diversi codici linguistici e vi sono infatti evidenze che esistono, già in questa fase, due sistemi lessicali distinti per le parole dei due codici.”¹⁵ (Bonifacci, 2018: 39)

As far as the *sequential bilingualism* typology is concerned with, on the other hand, it is known that children learn their L1 from their parents at home, undergoing a monolingual linguistic development in their L1; only later, when they will enter the school system, therefore around the age of 3 – 4 years old, will they be introduced to the L2. In this instance, it is important to acknowledge the diverse stages of linguistic development of these children, given that their own personal characteristics (styles, intelligences, personalities, etc.) and their respective linguistic learning context will influence their own linguistic acquisition outputs.

It appears clear, therefore, that in this instance of sequential bilingualism “the child does not need to separate the languages or become aware of its bilingualism because he / she already knows one language.” (Arnberg, 1947: 74) Indeed, not only the L1 will definitely influence the learning of the other/s language/s, but also different situations

¹⁵ “simultaneous bilinguals, therefore, are “sensitive” to the two different linguistic codes from birth and there are, indeed, evidences that two distinct lexical systems for the words of the two codes already exist in this phase.”

will probably characterize different individuals along with their respective and unique processes of linguistic development.

As a matter of fact, “children may resort to many types of strategies when they learn a new language, such as using their first language, over-generalizing or simplifying rules, etc.” (Arnberg, 1947: 75) and, most importantly, they will differ from adults (who often quit on learning L2s for various reasons), achieving native-like proficiency in all levels of language.

All in all, the main differentiation in the process of language acquisition between simultaneous and successive bilinguals is the one delineated by McLaughlin (1978), who claims that “speakers who have never been monolingual, as in the case of simultaneous bilinguals, may well process the languages very differently from those who learned one language after another. Likewise, anything a child learns in one language might have a subsequent effect on the language learned later. However, the distinction is not always easy to maintain in practice.” (Ball, 2005: 166)

To this purpose, we can delineate some advantages and disadvantages according to simultaneous or successive bilingualism. As Arnberg claims in “Raising children bilingually” (1947), “one of the main advantages with *simultaneous* bilingualism is that the young child is not really aware of its exposure of two languages in the beginning. This avoids the problem of the child being resistant to learning a new language when it already possesses an adequate means of communication, a problem sometimes mentioned in connection with successive bilingualism.” (Arnberg, 1947: 77) Moreover, it could be claimed that one could “take advantage of the infant’s ability to produce a wide variety of speech sounds, rather than waiting until some of these sounds have disappeared from the baby’s vocal repertoire and thus must be relearned. A disadvantage sometimes claimed with simultaneous bilingualism, however, is that simultaneous presentation of two languages may be confusing for the child. Nevertheless, such confusion, if it occurs at all, has usually been found to be of short duration.” (Arnberg, 1947: 77)

On the other hand, the advantages associated with *successive* bilingualism might be linked to the individual’s already established knowledge of the world (including language), its “longer memory span, and more efficient ways of handling information.” (Arnberg, 1947: 77) Its relative disadvantages, although, would be that “the child may be resistant to having to do the work of learning a new language when it already possesses an adequate means of communication in the first language. Not only must new labels be attached

to concepts which already have labels, but new grammatical forms must also be learned where a perfect satisfactorily means of expression already exists. Some researchers also suggest that, in successive bilingualism, the child must overcome the force of previously established habits, this problem being avoided in simultaneous bilingualism.” (Arnberg, 1947: 77)

In conclusion, now that we have delineated all the characteristics, including the pros and cons of each typology of bilingualism, we should claim, citing Arnberg’s (1947) statement, that “both simultaneous and successive bilingualism acquired during early childhood can lead to a high degree of bilingualism.” (Arnberg, 1947: 66)

As a matter of fact, “children can become bilingual or trilingual at any age by adding a language to their first language or languages” (Harding, Riley; 1986: 63), but still, “adults do likewise, they seem to learn just as well, pronunciation expected. In fact, they do *better* in terms of *rate* of acquisition, and not so well in terms of eventual outcome.” (Harding, Riley; 1963: 63)

This points out to the hypothesis of *critical periods*, according to which “the individual’s ability to learn a language gradually diminishes with age (...) human beings are programmed for the acquisition of language between birth and puberty. After that time, the brain begins to lose its plasticity and our ability to learn a language “naturally” diminishes correspondingly.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 63)

Of course, in order to acquire effectively an L2, as it should happen in any instance of bilingualism / plurilingualism, one needs to develop a positive *attitude* toward that language, whether we are referring to a child, an adolescent, or an adult. With respect to the child’s attitude, indeed, Harding and Riley (1986) claim that “a child who has a positive attitude towards the new community is obviously going to try to make friends: this in turn is going to make demands on his learning abilities and will also increase his motivation to learn. If the child feels rejected or ignored, on the other hand, he will not attempt to forge links with the new community and will consequently have a very low motivation. He himself will then reduce the number of occasions which would require him to communicate in the new language.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 64)

3.1.1. Infant Bilingualism

Many linguists and researchers in the field tried to give a definition to such *state*, such as, for example: “infant bilingualism is the term often used by linguists (e.g. by Einar Haugen, 1956: 72) to describe the type of bilingualism resulting from a child’s being exposed

simultaneously to more than one language from birth. Other terms are also used to refer to this type of bilingualism; for example, Merrill Swain (1972) calls it “bilingualism as a first language”, Henning Wode (1978) “first language bilingualism”, Ana Huerta (1977) “native acquisition of two languages”, and Jurgen Meisel (1986) “simultaneous acquisition of two first languages”.” (Saunders, 1988: 33-34)

Therefore, even if the term “*infant*” initially shocked purists, because of its inner nature of “inability to speak”, later on it was directed to indicate all those new-born children, who were being simultaneously exposed to two or more languages since birth. In other words, we can affirm that these “babies go directly from not speaking at all to speaking two languages. That is, cases of infant bilingualism necessarily involve the simultaneous acquisition of both languages.” (Harding-Esch, 2003: 42) Moreover, the fact that “the child has, therefore, as these terms suggest, from the beginning two (or more) languages, although does not imply that he or she will have equal command of both (...) Consequently, it is highly likely that one language will predominate and be spoken over more fluently, more accurately, or with a greater range of vocabulary.” (Saunders, 1988: 34)

In order for this to happen, the presence of two parents with different mother tongues is needed; moreover, they would each have to be starting talking their own L1 to the infant child from day 1 of his / her life, without any compromise. Many researches, indeed, found out that this approach “was one of the most common and successful types of bilingualism.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 40)

However, there is evidence that bilingual infants and children start speaking slightly later than monolinguals: this fact, though, should not worry parents whose aim is to raise their offspring bilingually, since situations may vary enormously and, most of all, these stages of *language production delay* would not exceed the eight-fifteen months of age of the observed children, thus this being in a perfectly acceptable timing according to monolinguals’ production standards.

3.1.2. Child Bilingualism

As Harding and Riley (1986) affirm, “by definition, child bilingualism involves the *successive acquisition* of two languages.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 41) Namely, “parents decide to establish first a basis of knowledge in the first language (L1) in their child. The child is then able to communicate in one language before they start educating their child in the second language.” (Sander, 2009: 5)

This parents' decision of introducing the child to the L2 takes place around his / her 3 years of age, when "the child shows a good linguistic development. It is able to build up four-word-utterances, and can produce isolated consonants." (Sander, 2009: 5)

Of course, this instance is common to all immigrant families: the moving to another country, indeed, which does not only imply the child's (and the parents' themselves) learning of the FL, but also a period of *adaptation* in the new country of residence, involves in many cases the children's L2 acquisition "in a natural environment, that is, through contact with playmates etc., but without any systematic formal instruction." (Saunders, 1988: 34-35)

Anyway, evidence has demonstrated that these children are able to learn the new language with exceptional rapidity, given that the circumstances of learning are appropriate, namely their *linguistic exposition, language use and need*. As a matter of fact, as Harding and Riley report in "The Bilingual Family. A handbook for parents" (1986), "if a language no longer serves the child's communicative needs he will not use it and if he doesn't use it he will forget it, quickly and completely." (Harding, Riley, 1986: 41)

More specifically, the concept of *child bilingualism* can also be classified under minor components, such as *simultaneous infant bilingualism* and *consecutive childhood bilingualism*. With respect to the first classification, "the child acquires a second language early in infancy but after some development of the mother tongue has been attained" (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 99), while in the other case "a basic linguistic ability is acquired early in infancy in the mother tongue and a second language is acquired right after." (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 99)

In conclusion, as Saunders (1988) affirms, "in many respects the problems facing such children and their parents, as they strive to acquire the language of the community and continue to use their own language in the home, will be similar to those encountered by families attempting to establish infant bilingualism." (Saunders, 1988: 34-35)

3.1.3. Adult Bilingualism

Given that the so-called *adolescent-bilingualism* type, "a term used to refer to people who have become bilingual *after puberty*" (Harding, Riley, 1986: 42) does not differ much from that of *adult*-type, we will focus just on this last condition.

Namely, “adult bilingualism is used for people who become bilingual after their teens” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 42), that is, “when the first language is acquired before the age of more or less 11 and further languages are learned at some age beyond this period.” (Beardsmore, 1986: 28-29)

Thus, this condition definitely differentiates from that of infant or child bilingualism, not only according to age-factor reasons, but also to native-like pronunciation: as a matter of fact, while children acquire native-like pronunciation in their L2, adults (or adolescents) will never achieve that level of proficiency.

According to the age factor which differentiates adult bilingualism from child (and inevitably infant) bilingualism, Charlotte Hoffmann (2014) states that “late bilingualism may be the result either of L2 acquisition in a natural environment (e.g. the migrant worker from Turkey who takes up a job in Germany without any previous knowledge of German), or of second language learning, as with the person who has studied the L2 for years, using graded language-teaching materials, attending courses, etc. Thus, late bilingualism may be of the natural or the artificial kind, the primary or the secondary, the ascribed or the achieved type. On the other hand, early bilingualism will, in most cases, be the natural, ascribed sort, especially in the case of the pre-school child.” (Hoffmann, 2014: 34-35)

More specifically, “when the child learns to speak, s(he) learns to use language as a means of expression, communication and social contact. The child acquires the formal aspects of a language, its sounds, words, meaning relationships, i.e. its grammar. But at the same time s(he) is also learning to use language as a tool for understanding and manipulating the world around her/him, i.e. s(he) is learning that she needs language to form relationships with the people who surround her or him. In other words, language is an essential ingredient of the child’s socialization process.” (Hoffmann, 2014: 34-35) On the other hand, as far as adult bilingualism is concerned with, “the learning process involved in late bilingualism can draw on the social and communicative experiences gained in childhood. This represents a considerable, yet often underestimated, advantage enjoyed by the older learner. Language patterns and assumptions about linguistic usage which have been acquired in the mother tongue are likely to help the learner when coming into contact with a new code, as he / she will extend them by analogy – although the other side of the coin is that this habit may result in interference when the two systems diverge.” (Hoffmann, 2014: 34-35)

3.2. Balanced and Dominant Bilingualism

Another distinction to be made is that between *balanced bilingualism* and *dominant bilingualism*. Although the general opinion considers the state of bilingualism as a situation in which one has *full competence* in both languages he / she knows, therefore one balanced with another in a sort of way, we know that, in reality, this is not the case.

As many researchers and evidence have demonstrated so far, indeed, the majority of bilingual people seem to have a *preference*, or better said *dominance*, with respect to one of the languages mastered.

Before we proceed on explaining this research evidence, though, we should better define the concepts of *balanced* and *dominant bilingualism*: according to Lambert (1955), a pioneer in this field, a *balanced* bilingual “refers to an individual who has equivalent competence in both languages (e.g.: someone brought up in a bilingual family and society where both languages receive equal consideration)” (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 98-99), whereas a *dominant* bilingual “applies to someone whose competence in the mother tongue surpasses his competence in the other language, at least in some domains (e.g.: a child learning language A from the father and language B from the mother and school, will probably have more chances to develop language B unless special actions are undertaken).” (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 98-99)

In any case, it was discovered (thanks to many studies conducted by pioneers such as Lambert (1959), Fishman (1972), Beardsmore (1982) and others) that it is highly unlikely, if not impossible, that an individual reaches the point of mastering the two languages in an equal way, according to the levels of linguistic proficiency and accuracy / fluency.

Therefore, we might cite some fundamental historical *steps* which established the “*base-principles*” of such theory. Starting from Lambert’s et al. (1959) claim that a *balanced bilingual* is an individual who is competent in both languages he / she knows and has perfect control / command in all domains of language and in all contexts of use (their research was based on individuals living in bilingual Canada), this assumption was later counter-argued by Baetens Beardsmore (1982). He claimed that, “though it is possible to come across bilinguals who are highly proficient in both languages, (...) balanced bilingualism is close to impossible to achieve, and is therefore very rare. Even high-level conference interpreters tend to have a preference for one of their languages, and will often specialize in interpreting into their dominant language despite the fact that they are highly fluent in both languages.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 6-7)

Moreover, *society* is another factor which influences the degree of dominance or balance in a bilingual's linguistic proficiency. As a matter of fact, Fishman (1972) argues that "bilinguals are rarely equally fluent in both languages in all topics" (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 6-7), because "sociolinguistic forces demand that bilinguals organize their languages in functionally complementary spheres." (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 6-7) As Skutnabb-Kangas reports in "Bilingualism or not. The Education of Minorities" as well, "in his view, bilingualism as a stabilized phenomenon can only exist where there is functional differentiation between the languages, diglossia. No society, he affirms, needs two languages for the same range of functions. He believes that a bilingual society produces exactly those kinds of bilingual whose one language is dominant in one area and whose other language is dominant in another." (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981)

Indeed, in this view, no society would need an individual who is equally competent in both languages he / she knows: this would cause the "death of bilingualism" (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 7), since "it is this complementary nature of language functions that assures the continued existence of bilingualism." (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 7)

On the other hand, we have to analyse the concept of *dominance* or *balance* according to the levels of *proficiency*. Specifically, these levels have to account for all 4 human macro-abilities, such as speaking, writing, reading and listening. As a consequence, even if a bilingual speaker is said to be dominant with respect to one of his linguistic repertoires (one of the two languages he / she masters), we cannot say the same thing regarding his / her linguistic abilities, in terms of proficiency. As a consequence, "balanced bilingualism should be understood in relative terms as bilingual speakers hardly ever show equal speaking and writing abilities in their languages, they are rarely equally fluent about all topics in all contexts." (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 98-99)

This points out to the fact that "even balanced bilinguals are therefore usually "dominant", that is, more proficient, in one of their two languages, although they may not be dominant in the same language in all areas." (Saunders, 1988: 9) This circumstance can be seen when a person, for instance, whose mother tongue is Mandarin Chinese but has studied Engineering in England, speaks English when talking about engineering issues, but switches to Mandarin Chinese for daily-speaking purposes (with Chinese peers, of course). Another case, for example, would be that of a Romanian immigrant child living in Italy, speaking Romanian at home with his / her family and Italian at school and, in general, with friends and peers. His Italian linguistic

abilities would indeed be more proficient with respect to “*study-material terminologies*”, while his / her own familiar linguistic knowledge with respect to daily life vocabulary would be more developed in his / her family language, namely Romanian (given that his / her parents started speaking it to him since birth or early in life).

In general, therefore, based on the so-called “*Complementarity Principle*” (Grosjean, 1977), we can assume that “nessun bilingue potrà mai avere pari competenze nelle due lingue, questo perché è necessario tenere conto di come le quattro competenze di base (leggere, scrivere, parlare, comprendere) si intrecciano con i contesti d’uso e le esperienze.”¹⁶ (Bonifacci, 2018: 20-23)

Moreover, being a *balanced bilingual* does not always mean to be a *monolingual speaker* with respect to each language, that is, to be able to mastering those languages up to perfection as a native speaker would do. In some cases, hence, a balanced bilingual’s knowledge of his / her two languages could correspond to a low level of linguistic accuracy and proficiency. Indeed, “balanced bilingualism entails a high communicative competence in both languages but not necessarily monolingual competence in both languages” (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 98-99), therefore, “balanced bilinguals in this sense are bilinguals who are *roughly equally skilled* in their two languages, i.e. a balance exists between the two. This means that someone who could pass for a native in both languages would be considered a balanced bilingual, but so too would someone whose performance in one (or both) of his languages was less than perfect, as long as his ability in both was roughly equal.” (Saunders, 1988: 8)

“Last but not least, the term “dominant” is also used with reference to the tendency for a bilingual’s two languages to have some influence on each other, that is, for what Weinreich calls “interference” to take place between the two languages” (Saunders, 1988: 10), while “subordinate” stands for the less dominant (thus less mastered) language spoken by the bilingual individual.

In conclusion, as Silva-Corvalan and Treffers-Daller (2016) affirm, we can claim that “if a bilingual child has a dominant language, this language is very likely to correspond to the

¹⁶ “no bilingual individual can ever have equal skills in the two languages; this is because it is necessary to take into account how the four basic skills (reading, writing, speaking, understanding) are intertwined with the contexts of use and experiences.”

language that constitutes most of the child's input, which has often been claimed to be the language of the wider community" (Silva-Corvalan, Treffers-Daller, 2016: 64); however, "societal language dominance" does not always correspond to "individual language dominance", which is the result of multiple and various kinds of inputs, coming from the society (therefore outside the home environment) and from the inner, private family sphere (inside the home environment). It might happen, as a matter of fact, that the dominant language of a bilingual child is not that of the community (which is found in the school / playground / etc.), but that of the family (therefore the minor and non-official language), mainly due to his / her own *language use, frequency, preference or proficiency* reasons.

3.3. Compound, Co-ordinate and Subordinate / Sub-coordinate Bilingualism

With respect to the *cognitive elaboration* and *organisation* of the linguistic input of the bilingual individual, we might distinguish between these further types of bilingualism: *compound, coordinate* and *subordinate / sub-coordinate* bilingualism.

As Harding and Riley (1986) point out, "such differences are usually associated with the context in which their bilingualism has been acquired, although there is no necessary one-to-one relationship between the two." (Harding, Riley, 1986: 37)

Specifically, according to their inner cognitive organisation, the three different typologies reported above can be defined this way:

- a) "*the COORDINATIVE TYPE OF BILINGUALISM applies to individuals who have two functionally independent systems. Such an individual has two linguistic signs for any given referent, each of which is related to a separate unit of meaning.*" (Harding, Riley, 1986: 37)
- b) "*the COMPOUND TYPE OF BILINGUALISM applies to individuals who have two linguistic signs, say PAIN and "bread" but both of these are related to a "fused" unit of meaning, which one could represent here as "BPRAEIAND".*" (Harding, Riley, 1986: 37)
- c) "*the SUBORDINATIVE TYPE OF BILINGUALISM applies to individuals who are dominant in one language. They have two linguistic signs but only one unit of meaning, which is that of the dominant language.*" (Harding, Riley, 1986: 37)

Therefore, if we want to see these two dimensions (*context* and *cognitive organisation*) in relation with each other, therefore influencing one another, we can cite Cantone's argument, which started from Weinreich's (1968: 9-11) original and foundational theory on this matter.

The basic assumption is that "the way one learns a language is said to have an impact on how concepts are encoded and stored in the brain" (Cantone, 2007: 5), therefore three other definitions are explicated according to the three typologies of bilingualism (with respect to context and cognitive organisation).

Namely, these are:

- d) "*COMPOUND BILINGUALISM* stands for an individual who learns the two languages in the same context and situation, so that two words (one in each language) have one common meaning and representation in the brain, thus creating an interdependence of the two languages." (Cantone, 2007: 5)
- e) "*COORDINATE BILINGUALISM* states an independency between the two languages: the individual learns the two languages in different contexts, so that each word has its own specific meaning." (Cantone, 2007: 5)
- f) "*The third type of bilingualism proposed by Weinreich is the SUB-COORDINATE. In this case, one language is stronger and faster than the other one, which results in establishing one meaning, namely the one of the language which has been acquired first. Whenever the second, weaker language (WL) is used, the representation recalled will be that of the stronger language (SL).*" (Cantone, 2007:5)

Pragmatically, these circumstances result into three different situations of learning and linguistic production. Thus, as Chacon Beltran affirms in "An Introduction to Sociolinguistics" (2013), under the *coordinative type of bilingualism* circumstance, "different contexts give way to different meanings with dissimilar conceptual systems (e.g.: someone who learns English as his / her mother tongue and later learns a foreign language in school)" (Chacon Beltran; 2013: 97); the *compound type of bilingualism*, on the other hand, "entails that the languages involved are somehow interdependent (e.g.: a child who learns two languages at home at the same time, probably one coming from the father and the other one from the mother)" (Chacon Beltran; 2013: 97); and finally, under the *sub-coordinate type of bilingualism* circumstance, the situation delineated is that of "a child who learns both languages at home simultaneously but one of them is dominant, probably because s/he spends more time with one of the parents)." (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 97)

All in all, when distinguishing between compound and coordinate bilinguals, taking a psychological perspective, researchers such as “Ervin & Osgood (1954) suggested that for compound bilinguals a verbal label and its translation equivalent have one conceptual representation common to both languages, whereas for coordinate bilinguals there are two distinct representations, one for each language.” (Hamers, Blanc, 2000: 163)

In addition, according to Lambert, Havelka and Crosby (1958), “when compared to their compound counterparts, coordinate bilinguals:

- a) Make more semantic distinctions between a word and its translation equivalent;
- b) Have two relatively independent association networks for translation equivalents, and
- c) Have greater difficulty with translation.” (Hamers, Blanc, 2000: 164)

On the other hand, compound bilinguals:

- a) “Have a higher degree of interdependence in the organisation of their two codes than coordinates;
- b) May possess dissimilar semantic networks for a word in one language and its translation equivalent.” (Hamers, Blanc, 2000: 165)

However, despite these inner differences, (Lambert, 1969), both types of bilinguals seem to be able to switch rather (and equally) fast between languages, when translation is needed.

Finally, it is fundamental to link the dimension of cognitive organisation (specifically, that of compound – coordinate bilingualism) to the dimension of age of linguistic acquisition. As Bonifacci (2018) points out, “nel bambino bilingue consecutivo che parla una lingua (L1) in famiglia e viene esposto alla L2 verso i 4-5 anni di età, nel contesto scolastico, inizialmente si osserverà un bilinguismo di tipo *subordinato*, ovvero il lessico in L2 (italiano) deve passare dal lessico in L1 per accedere al sistema concettuale, ovvero al sistema dei significati. In seguito l’accesso al sistema concettuale può avvenire per via diretta dalla L2, in un bilinguismo di tipo *coordinato* (sistemi indipendenti) o *composito* (sistemi interconnessi).”¹⁷ (Bonifacci, 2018: 20-23)

¹⁷ “In the consecutive bilingual child who speaks a language (L1) in the family and is exposed to the L2 towards the 4-5 years of age, in the scholastic context, we will initially observe a subordinate type of bilingualism, that is, the lexicon in L2 (Italian) must move from the lexicon to L1 to access the conceptual system, or rather the system of

This links to Hamers and Blanc's conclusion, which is also suitable to our purposes, that is: "compound bilinguals are more often simultaneous bilinguals, whereas coordinate bilinguals tend to be consecutive bilinguals. Furthermore, because coordinate bilinguals are more often than not consecutive, their bilinguality is often not balanced and they may be more proficient in their L1 than in their L2." (Hamers, Blanc, 2000: 164-165)

3.4. Additive and Subtracting Bilingualism

Another distinction among the different typologies of bilingualism is the one between the *additive type of bilingualism* and the *subtracting type of bilingualism*.

This characterisation points out not only to the individual factors, but also the societal ones. Moreover, the focus is on the *advantages* (or *disadvantages*, but we know that this is not the real case) that knowing more than one language may imply.

Indeed, as Colin Baker affirms in "Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism" (2006), Lambert (1974) had originally delineated a first distinction between additive and subtracting bilingualism, in terms of cognitive outcomes: in his own words, "additive bilingualism is used to refer to positive cognitive outcomes from an individual being bilingual. Subtractive bilingualism hence refers to the negative affective and cognitive effects of bilingualism (e.g. where both languages are "under developed")." (Baker, 2006: 74)

As far as the societal level is concerned with, however, Landry et al. (1991) gave another definition to the above distinction, in terms of "enrichment or loss of minority language, culture and ethnolinguistic identity at a societal level." (Baker, 2006: 74) In other words, they claim that "in additive bilingualism, language minority members are proficient (or becoming proficient) in both languages, and have positive attitudes to the first and second language (Landry *et al.*, 1991)" (Baker, 2006: 74), whereas in subtractive bilingualism "the bilingual's competence in his two languages at any point is likely to reflect some stage in the subtraction of the L1 and its replacement by the L2." (Cummins, Baker, 2001: 39)

meanings. Later on, the access to the conceptual system can take place directly from L2, in a coordinated type of bilingualism (independent systems) or in a composite type (interconnected systems)."

This points out to the importance of the sociocultural environment, which inevitably influences the attitudes towards language, and consequently the bilingual's own linguistic choices, which are more than often made on the base of *value* assigned to the majority / minority language.

As a matter of fact, as Chacon Beltran points out in "An Introduction to Sociolinguistics" (2013), "*additive* bilingualism occurs when both languages are socially valued." (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 99) Thus, "the child makes use of both languages and accordingly takes advantage of this potentially enhancing situation to gain cognitive flexibility. In this case, the acquisition of the second language does not have adverse effects on the language or languages already known." (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 99)

On the other hand, we note that "*subtractive* bilingualism, conversely, results from a sociocultural context where the mother tongue is detracted and, as a consequence, the child's cognitive development may be hindered because the development of the second language interferes with the development of the first language." (Chacon Beltran, 2013: 99)

Overall, therefore, it seems essential to consider language(s) in relation to the *social context*: according to Bonifacci's research (2018), the additive bilingualism instance is found when the bilingual / plurilingual speaker feels he / she is advantaged at a social / relational / scholastic / working level for speaking two or more languages. This points out to the dimension of *acknowledgment of the bilingual / plurilingual advantage*, which should be inner-felt by every plurilingual speaker of the world.

Moreover, he / she would consider the two or more languages of his / her linguistic repertoire as complementary to one another, not in competition (when one predominates the other), therefore he / she would use them in different contexts, and, most importantly, he / she *would choose* which one to use, according to his / her own personal competences and attitudes / preferences towards them.

Conversely, a *subtractive bilingualism* instance is found when one of the languages known by the individual represents a *minority language*, which is typical of immigrant people / families, therefore the use of this one would not appear to represent an advantage for the individual, with respect to socio-cultural benefits.

This competency between the two languages, therefore, (the minority and the majority language), would then cause a phenomenon of "*attrition*", or "*linguistic erosion*", with respect to the minority language, since this last one, due to its *useless nature* according

to socio-cultural purposes, would not be used by the bilingual / plurilingual speaker anymore.

This also points out to the fact that, most importantly, “language choice is influenced by the prestige of a language in a community or society. Whether a language is maintained in a new environment depends very much on the prestige of that language in this context.” (Aronin, Hufeisen, 2009: 123-124)

All in all, as Baker (2006) well-explains, “an additive bilingual situation is where the addition of a second language and culture is unlikely to replace or displace the first language and culture (Lambert, 1980). For example, English-speaking North Americans who learn a second language (e.g. French, Spanish) will not lose their English but gain another language and some of its attendant culture. The “value added” benefits may not only be linguistic and cultural, but social and economic as well.” (Baker, 2006: 74)

On the other hand, “when the second language and culture are acquired (e.g. immigrants) with pressure to replace or demote the first language, a subtractive form of bilingualism may occur. This may relate to a positive self-concept, loss of cultural or ethnic identity, with possible alienation or marginalization. For example, an immigrant may find pressure to use the dominant language and feel embarrassment in using the home language.” (Baker, 2006: 74)

In general, therefore, we can claim that “when the second language is prestigious and powerful, used in mainstream education and in the jobs market, and when the minority language is perceived as of low status and value, minority languages may be threatened. Instead of addition, there is subtraction; division instead of multiplication.” (Baker, 2006: 74)

3.5. Semilingualism

A consequence of the subtracting bilingualism phenomenon, in some respects, is the so-called condition of *semilingualism*, which, according to Cummins and Baker (2001), “refers to the linguistic competence, or lack of it, of individuals who have had contact with two languages since childhood without adequate training or stimulation in either. As a consequence, these individuals know two languages poorly and do not attain the same levels as native speakers in either language.” (Cummins, Baker, 2001: 40)

This circumstance, which “has dominated some discussions on the issue of degree of bilingualism” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 8), started from Hansegard’s (1968) analysis

of a group of Finnish-minority students in Sweden, who lacked proficiency in both their languages (Finnish L1 and Swedish L2). Precisely, he described them as individuals who lacked “in six language competences:

- a) Size of vocabulary.
- b) Correctness of language.
- c) Unconscious process of language (automatism).
- d) Language creation (neologisation).
- e) Mastery of the functions of language (e.g. emotive, cognitive).
- f) Meanings and imagery.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 8)

All in all, therefore, as Chin and Wigglesworth (2007) claim, it appears evident that “a semilingual is both quantitatively and qualitatively deficient in comparison to monolinguals, and semilingualism has been blamed for the low academic achievement of minority children.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 8) Of the same opinion are also Cummins and Baker (2001), who cite other researchers stating that “Scandinavian researchers (e.g. Hansegard, 1968; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1975) have argued that this condition has negative emotional, cognitive, linguistic and scholastic consequences.” (Cummins, Baker, 2001: 40)

3.6. Passive / Recessive Bilingualism and Language Attrition

The last typology of bilingualism which we will explain here after, is the so-called *passive* or *recessive bilingualism*. In Chin and Wigglesworth’s (2007) words, “the term *passive* or *recessive bilinguals* refers to bilinguals who are gradually losing competence in one language, usually because of disuse” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 7). This might happen when, “for example, a Dutch migrant in Australia may find himself isolated from the Dutch-speaking community as his daily encounters are with English-speaking Australians (see Clyne 1991). Over time, his proficiency level in Dutch may deteriorate owing to the long period of non-use.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 7)

As a matter of fact, it is known that “periods of non-use can have various effects on bilingual competence” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 7) and this can be seen in those bilingual communities (Italians in Australia, just to cite an example), where only the old Italian generation (grandparents) know their original L1 (Italian), while their offspring,

(nephews and nieces included), do not know how to speak that language, in the majority of the cases, but only understand it (if they are lucky!). This sad phenomenon is the result of a *language shift*, where the *home language* has been lost, due to the predominance of the other, *official* and *dominant language*.

However, this is not the only case where the process of *language attrition / erosion* takes place. In general, this instance can be found in many circumstances, such as:

- a) Students learning a FL at school (for many years) who, after the end of the academic cycle (Primary and Secondary School), forget it due to the *non-use* of it in their daily life.
- b) Exchange or Erasmus students who learn an L2 abroad (for a relatively long period, between 6 months – 1 year) who, after having gone back home, and after some time, start losing their linguistic knowledge / ability previously acquired abroad.
- c) Children who emigrate with their families to another country might actually forget their original L1 (especially if they are very young at the moment of the family's permanent emigration).
- d) Etc.

All these instances are demonstrations of the fact that, if a language is not used / practiced, the process of *language attrition* will take place. This, according to Chin and Wigglesworth (2007), “refers to the process whereby an individual’s ability to speak and understand a language is reduced. The term used for loss of language at a community level is *language shift*.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 71)

Moreover, “while language attrition, or forgetting (Hansen 2011), is for the most part a psycholinguistic process which takes place at an individual level, it is strongly influenced by a number of social variables” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 72) and, according to Van Els (1986), four types of language attrition might take place in one’s own linguistic knowledge and proficiency. These, specifically, are “determined by two dimensions – firstly, *what* is lost, and secondly, *the environment* in which it is lost.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 73)

According to this classification, we can delineate two particular instances:

- a) “*Where it is lost: First-language environment*
What is lost: - First language: E.g. loss of the first language as a result of ageing and / or some pathological conditions (e.g. dementia or trauma); - *Second language:* E.g. loss

of a foreign or second language upon return to the first-language environment, or through lack of contact with the second language owing to end of schooling, moving etc.

b) Where it is lost: Second-language environment

What is lost: - *First language:* E.g. loss of the first language as a result of emigrating to a country in which a different language is spoken; especially likely to apply to children who emigrate with parents; - *Second language:* E.g. language loss late after emigrating to a country in which a different language is spoken (may also be related to pathological conditions).” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 73)

4. False Myths on Bilingualism

4.1. The Creation of False Myths on Bilingualism: a bit of History

At the beginning of the last century, the widespread belief that “bilingualism is bad for you” was well-proved. Many researchers and evidence had postulated and then established that bilinguals, in general, were inferior to monolinguals, with respect to many factors.

“The earliest documented empirical work on the detrimental effects of bilingualism” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 56), as Chin and Wigglesworth affirm, “came from three articles published by Saer and his colleagues between 1922 and 1924.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 56)

Specifically, they analysed over 14,000 seven-to-eleven-year-old monolingual and bilingual children living in Wales, comparing their verbal and non-verbal production results according to specific tasks (which included IQ tests). Evidence (though affected by methodological problems with respect to the researchers’ procedure and typology of data measurement) showed that bilinguals performed *worse* than monolinguals in all types of tasks, and that this *cognitive / intellectual ability gap* would also increase according to their age (the more the bilingual children would grow older, the worse they would perform at such tasks compared to monolinguals).

As we have just claimed, however, there were some major methodological flaws in the establishment of such prejudicial evidence / theory: one of these is the fact that the researchers did not consider the socio-economic differences between monolinguals / bilinguals who were being tested, as well as their rural or urban provenience. Specifically, Saer “was comparing middle-class monolingual children with working-class bilingual children, and the reliability of tasks he used in terms of what these tasks say about cognitive ability of bilinguals was also questionable.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 56)

Moreover, all children (bilinguals and monolinguals) were being tested in English (which was not the bilinguals’ major language), therefore they were being collocated in a disadvantaged position, since “there is no doubt that being tested in the weaker language is one of the reasons why the bilinguals performed poorly in the experimental tasks.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 56)

Consequently, other studies and researches followed, in order to prove the *inferior nature* characterizing the bilingual condition. To cite some of them, “in an article published in Switzerland in 1928, de Reynold expressed the opinion that bilingualism leads to language mixing and language confusion which in turn results in a reduction in the ability to think and act precisely, a decrease in intelligence, an increase in mental lethargy and reduced self-discipline” (Saunders, 1988: 14-15), whereas “in 1933, Leo Weisgerber, a German linguist, believed that bilingualism could impair the intelligence of a whole ethnic group.” (Saunders, 1988: 14-15)

All in all, these studies seemed to confirm not only the *unnatural nature* of bilingualism, but also sustained the overall “assumptions of the monolingual majorities in Europe, and the USA (where it also gave “scientific” support to the social concept of the “melting pot” in which ethnic differences were to disappear).” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 67-68)

As a consequence, “despite their methodological flaws, these studies had considerable influence, and by the middle of the twentieth century the opinion that bilingualism is detrimental to cognitive functioning was firmly established. This was so despite the fact that several contemporary studies had found no significant positive or negative impact of bilingualism on mental functioning.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 57-58)

Therefore, even if “most studies reporting that bilingualism had “negative effects” were carried out on children from minority language groups who have to learn the majority language whether they like it or not and who, very often, have not reached a very high degree of proficiency in their mother tongue when they start the second language in school” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 67-68), and even if these tests did not measure innate abilities, thus placing bilingual individuals at a disadvantage, “(needless to say, using a culturally biased set of instruments on a bilingual and bicultural population is methodologically questionable. Furthermore, traditional IQ tests measure only convergent thinking- that is, arriving at a single solution after assessing a series of problems. This excludes divergent thinking, which has been linked with creative intelligence)” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 57-58), bilinguals were still placed at a lower, inferior level than monolinguals.

It was only in the 1960s that this original, erroneous theory, started being argued and challenged: “in 1962 Peal and Lambert published the first major study to show that bilinguals as a group performed *better* than monolinguals on both verbal and non-verbal intelligence tests” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 67-68) and, most importantly, what challenged the prior theories, thus “revealing” their defects, was that “most of the studies reporting

“positive effects” were made in societies where bilingualism is encouraged, where the languages concerned are both high-status languages and where the parents of the children tested have relatively high socio-economic class.” (Harding, Riley, 1986: 67-68)

4.2. False Myths Today: what they are and why they are worldwide spread

Nowadays, the issue regarding the *misconception* of what *bilingualism / plurilingualism* means, therefore the assumption that these *statements*, pragmatically these *false myths*, are real, is still unfortunately worldwide spread.

Why would that happen, one might ask, since many studies and researchers have proved them wrong, though? There are many responses to such questions, namely:

- a) *“the information and new research about bilinguals and multilinguals is poorly disseminated;*
- b) *most of the technology for studying the working brain has been developed only since the mid-1970s, and observation of healthy, normal, multilingual brains has become commonplace even more recently;*
- c) *the phenomenon of thousands of new multilinguals each year is a relatively new one, and the research has a hard time reflecting reality;*
- d) *“bilingual education” still sounds suspicious to many, especially with the backtracking that has taken place in the field;*
- e) *the relatively few opportunities for multilinguals to discuss their traits in a critical light;*
- f) *those who a generation ago grew up in “international families” and travelled quite a bit as youngsters were probably not given the opportunity to reflect on their situations.”*
(Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 1-2)

Moreover, as François Grosjean (2010), Professor Emeritus at Neuchâtel University (Switzerland), affirms, not only are these common misconceptions worldwide spread, but also every country has its own specific attitude towards bilingualism and bilinguals, in terms of acceptance or general beliefs.

Therefore, “in Europe, for example, bilingualism is seen favourably but people have very high standards for who should be considered bilingual. The latter should have perfect knowledge of

their languages, have no accent in them, and even, in some countries, have grown up with their two (or more) languages. At that rate, very few people consider themselves bilingual, even though, in Switzerland for example, the majority of the inhabitants know and use two or more languages in their everyday life.” (Grosjean, 2010)¹⁸

In the United States, on the other hand, the situation is even more complicated: despite the fact that this country has always been one with the highest percentage of bilingual / multilingual people living in it, it never appeared to promote and value the bilingual / plurilingual trait of most of its citizens (or residents).

On the other hand, “the *tolerance* that America has generally shown towards minority languages over the centuries has favoured the linguistic *integration* of its speakers. As sociologist Nathan Glazer writes, the language of minorities “shrivelled in the air of freedom while they had apparently flourished under adversity in Europe.” (Grosjean, 2010)¹⁹

It was only with the United States President Barack Obama, that a new *boost* towards the promotion of bilingualism / plurilingualism took place. As a matter of fact, when he “stated that children should speak more than one language, he was probably referring to the paradox one finds in this country: on the one hand, the world's languages brought to the United States are not maintained, and they wither away, and on the other hand only a few of them are taught in schools, to too few students, and for too short a time. A national resource - the country's knowledge of the languages of the world - is being put aside and is not being maintained.” (Grosjean, 2010)²⁰

Overall, in conclusion, even if “for most of the 20th century bilingualism was seen as a negative phenomenon, damaging intelligence and well-being (Saer, 1922)” (Sekerina *et al.*, 2019: 85), but “once this myth had been dispelled, the pendulum seems to have gone the other way, with bilingualism being associated with all conceivable benefits” (Sekerina *et al.*, 2019: 85), many and diverse false myths are still present in our society.

If we really want to move forward, with respect to this worldwide phenomenon, it is essential that everybody of us, primarily the professionals in the field, start understanding and disputing all these misconceptions. Further on, since “education and socioeconomic status often go hand-in-hand with language proficiency” (Holtz, 2011: 158), “this apparent mismatch should be further investigated. Language abilities may cause

¹⁸ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

¹⁹ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

²⁰ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

education or work difficulties but the clinical neuropsychologist must separate the differences between languages or cognitive impairment and residual effects of incomplete learning of the first or second language.” (Holtz, 2011: 158)

Bilingualism, indeed, should be considered a personal and social enrichment, an “*intercultural passport*”, being this one a valid instrument of communication between different languages and cultures. In addition, we know that it is valuable in terms of job opportunities and economic growth, along with economic global trades, therefore it should never be undervalued or misjudged, therefore stopped from having an impact in society. As Grosjean (2010) has also pointed out, “one never regrets knowing several languages but one can certainly regret not knowing enough.” (Grosjean, 2010)²¹

4.3. False Myths versus Reality

At this point we will list a number of false myths which have been long-time present in society, to which though, we will furnish suitable counter-arguments, in order to demonstrate the fallacies underneath them.

The most common false myths are (Grosjean, 2010; Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003; Centeno, 2017; Rodriguez Bellas, 2014; American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017; BISP, 2016; CSLR)²²:

- a) “*Bilingualism is a rare phenomenon*” (Grosjean, 2010)²³, therefore, “*most of the world is monolingual*” (Grosjean, 2010)²⁴:

²¹ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

²² The following list of myths reported in brackets (“”) are cited from the authors’ / Academies’ / Centres of Research’s works, in the following websites: https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html, https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html, <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>, <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>, <https://www.bilingualschoolparis.com/en/news/000087-5-misconceptions-about-bilingualism>, <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/bilingtl/myths.html>, https://books.google.it/books?id=Yg5OAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

²³ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

²⁴ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

As we have claimed at the beginning of the thesis, it is widely known that the majority of the world, today, is bilingual / plurilingual. Therefore, this myth sounds completely nonsense, when evident data are taken into account. As Olena Centeno points out in her essay “Nine Bilingual Myths That Are Crippling Your Kids” (2017), “roughly 130 countries out of 195 speak 2 or more languages” (Centeno, 2017)²⁵ and “rates of multilingualism are increasing globally, not decreasing. Even if you don’t personally know any other parents raising a child bilingually, you can rest assured that it’s a common approach — and becoming more so.” (Centeno, 2017)²⁶

However, as far as the “bilingual and not monolingual trait” of the majority of the world’s population is concerned with, we cannot claim that these individuals are also biliterate. As a matter of fact, as Tokuhama-Espinosa states in “The Multilingual Mind: Issues discussed by, for and about People living with many Languages” (2003), “most people around the world speak at least two, and often more, languages but can write in only one, if that. This is mathematically logical if one looks at the number of languages that exist in the world. There are between 2,500 and 6,000 languages, depending on whether one counts dialects, creoles, and pidgin languages.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 10)

b) *“Bilinguals have equal and perfect knowledge of their languages”* (Grosjean, 2010)²⁷ / *“If a child is not equally fluent in both languages, he or she is not truly bilingual”* (American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017)²⁸:

We know that, in reality, this is not the case. As previously explained, bilingual / plurilingual individuals might have (a) dominant/s and (a) subordinate language/s. As a consequence, “bilinguals know their languages to the level that they need them. Some bilinguals are dominant in one language, others do not know how to read and write one of their languages, others have only passive knowledge of a language and, finally, a very small minority, have equal and perfect fluency in their languages. What is important to keep in mind is that bilinguals are very diverse, as are monolinguals.” (Grosjean, 2010)²⁹

²⁵ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

²⁶ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

²⁷ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

²⁸ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>

²⁹ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

Therefore, we can presume that “being bilingual means being able to express yourself comfortably in two different languages. This does not necessarily mean that you are as equally comfortable in both languages, or in all domains (professional areas of expertise, or household terminology, etc.). This does not also mean you can write in both languages (such as bilingual individuals who can speak Mandarin, but not write it).” (BISP, 2016)³⁰

c) “*Real bilinguals have no accent in their different languages*” (Grosjean, 2010)³¹:

If we consider *age* as an important factor influencing the degree of bilingualism, therefore all its sub-components (including *accent*), it is evident (and also well-proved, as we have demonstrated in the previous chapter), that it is not true that all bilinguals do not have an accent when using their different languages.

Specifically, we know that children who acquired their languages since birth (or very early in life) will most likely not have an accent in their two or more languages, whereas adults, who acquired their languages later in life (*late bilingualism*), will probably if not surely have an accent in them, due to brain plasticity / faculty development and changes across a life-span.

Consequently, as Grosjean (2010) points out, “having an accent or not in a language does not make you more or less bilingual. It depends on when you acquired your languages. In fact, some extremely fluent and balanced bilinguals have an accent in the one, or the other, language; other, less fluent, bilinguals may have no accent at all.” (Grosjean, 2010)³²

Moreover, it is known that “children who learn a second language in the first window of opportunity (bilingual from birth) generally have perfect accents in both of their languages, because they have treated both languages as a single unit since birth. After about two years of age, a human’s auditory cortex narrows quite drastically; he is thus unable to distinguish different sounds, and is therefore hard pressed to reproduce them. Recent studies show that children are universal receivers of sounds; that is, they can distinguish all sounds of all languages at birth, but they lose this ability within the first nine months of life (Werker 1997). This means all children are able to pronounce all languages fluently if exposed from birth, in consistent manner, and presumably with input from a native speaker.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 7)

³⁰ <https://www.bilingualschoolparis.com/en/news/000087-5-misconceptions-about-bilingualism>

³¹ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

³² https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

As far as the adults are concerned with, on the other hand, “there is an argument which indicates that adults can learn foreign languages without accents, if they choose to. This is based on the fact that your tongue is an organ that can be treated like a muscle. You can train your tongue to pronounce sounds that can be treated like a muscle. You can train your tongue to pronounce sounds that it has never produced before, so long as your ear is first trained to recognize the normally unintelligible sounds.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 7)

d) “*Bilinguals are born translators*” (Grosjean, 2010)³³ :

As indicated by Grosjean (2010), “even though bilinguals can translate simple things from one language to another, they often have difficulties with more specialized domains. The reaction people have is almost always, “But I thought you were bilingual!”. In fact, bilinguals use their languages in different situations, with different people, in different domains of life (this is called the complementarity principle). Unless they learned their languages formally (in school, for example), or have trained to be translators, they often do not have translations equivalents in the other language.” (Grosjean, 2010)³⁴

e) “*Mixing languages is a sign of laziness in bilinguals*” (Grosjean, 2010)³⁵:

Mixing languages, therefore the so-called phenomenon of *code mixing / code switching*, as previously explained, is not unusual nor has a negative effect in bilinguals / plurilinguals cognitive / linguistic development. The fact that bilinguals / plurilinguals switch languages (precisely, words from one language to another) when speaking with another bilingual / plurilingual individual, makes total sense, due to their double / multiple mental linguistic systems available.

As Grosjean (2010) explains, “mixing languages such as code-switching and borrowing is a very common behaviour in bilinguals speaking to other bilinguals. The two language repertoires are available in bilingual situations and can be used at will. Many expressions and words are better said in the one or the other language; mixing permits to use the right one without having recourse to translation which simply may not do justice to what one wants to express. This said, in other situations, bilinguals know that they cannot mix their languages (e.g. when speaking to monolinguals) and they then stick to just one language.” (Grosjean, 2010)³⁶

³³ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

³⁴ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

³⁵ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

³⁶ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

In particular, as Tokuhamma-Espinosa points out in “The Multilingual Mind: Issues discussed by, for and about People living with many Languages” (2003), “children often mix their languages during a certain stage in their proficiency development, leading adults to view them as “confused”. For children brought up bilingual from birth, there is a perfectly normal stage of mixing. Children initially see their languages as a single unit, and they use them as such, drawing from all their languages where they see fit. Somewhere between ages two and a half and three and a half, children can separate their languages and label them (“Mommy speak Italian and Daddy speaks Chinese”). With this cognitive separation, they understand the concept of “translation.” Occasionally, proficient bilinguals “borrow” vocabulary from their stronger language when they do not know the word in their weaker language; this is a question of learning words, not of mental distraction or confusion.” (Tokuhamma-Espinosa, 2003: 2-4)

Moreover, “some bilingual children may mix grammar rules from time to time, or they might use words from both languages in the same sentence (i.e., “quiero mas juice” [I want more juice]). This is a normal part of bilingual language development and does not mean that your child is confused. Usually by age 4, children can separate the different languages but might still blend or mix both languages in the same sentence on occasion. They will ultimately learn to separate both languages correctly.” (American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017)³⁷

In conclusion, as Olena Centeno (2017) affirms, “this is a myth that springs from something we all do: search for a good alternative when we aren’t quite sure what the right word for something is.” (Centeno, 2017)³⁸

f) “*Bilinguals are also bicultural*” (Grosjean, 2010)³⁹:

This is not always true. A person living, for example, in Switzerland, where both German and French are used, might feel as being only *German*, or only *French*, with respect to the culture present in that territory. As we notice, therefore, language and culture do not always go hand in hand. In other words, “one can be bilingual without being bicultural just as one can be monolingual and bicultural (e.g. the British who live in the USA).” (Grosjean, 2010)⁴⁰

³⁷ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>

³⁸ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

³⁹ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

⁴⁰ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

g) “*Bilinguals have double or split personalities*” (Grosjean, 2010)⁴¹:

This is a definitely wrong assumption, since it is evident (and even common to monolingual individuals themselves, in some respects) that a bilingual / plurilingual individual might change *behaviour, language, feelings*, when facing different situations, namely interlocutors, contexts, etc. In other words, “like monolinguals, it is the situation or the person one is speaking to which induces slight changes in behaviour, opinions, feelings, etc., not the fact that one is bilingual.” (Grosjean, 2010)⁴²

h) “*Bilinguals express their emotions in the first language*” (Grosjean, 2010)⁴³:

This is not true if the age factor of language acquisition is taken into account. Indeed, a child learning both his / her languages since birth (*infant bilingualism*) or early in life (*child bilingualism*) will probably have no differences in expressing his / her emotions in one or the other language. The reason behind this “unconscious choice” is that there is no predominance of one language over the other, therefore, as a consequence, emotions could be expressed in either way (through either *modalities*, or *medium of transmission*, namely language).

On the other hand, an adult learning his / her L2 at a later stage in life (*adolescent bilingualism* or *adult bilingualism*), will certainly have a predominant language (the one developed since birth, in other words his / her L1), which will be the one used as a medium to express his / her own feelings and emotions.

In general, though, “emotions and bilingualism produce a very complicated but also very personal reality that has no set rules. Some bilinguals prefer to use one language, some the other, and some use both of them to express their feelings and emotions.” (Grosjean, 2010)⁴⁴

i) “*Bilinguals acquire their two or more languages only in childhood*” (Grosjean, 2010)⁴⁵ / “*If a child does not learn a second language when he or she is very young, he or she will never be fluent*” (American Academy of Pediatrics and

⁴¹ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

⁴² https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

⁴³ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

⁴⁴ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

⁴⁵ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017)⁴⁶/ “*Bilingual Education Needs to Happen from Infancy. After Three Years, a Second Language is Too Hard to Learn*” (American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017)⁴⁷:

If this myth was true, and proved, the majority of the statements of this thesis would not make sense. As we have repeated more than once in the last chapters, there are many typologies of bilingualism, depending on age factors (therefore, implying *simultaneous* or *successive bilingualism*), degree of bilingualism, context of bilingual acquisition, etc.

In addition, if the above assumptions were true, we would also not explain why many adults become bilingual later in life, and why some people manage to learn an L2 after puberty (without acquiring the foreign accent, though, which we know is a specific capacity characterizing the acquisition of language in childhood).

Overall, “although the ideal language-learning window is during the first few years of life—the most rapid period of brain development—older children and adults can still become fluent in a second language.” (American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017)⁴⁸

In other words, “of course being bilingual right from the start is the best thing under perfect conditions, but perfect conditions and situations are few and far between, as we all know. It is never too late to expose a child to another language. The brain’s potential to acquire speech is still unknown, but it seems to be boundless.” (Rodriguez Bellas, 2014)⁴⁹

Precisely, even if “infants have the definite advantage in learning two languages at once. The first year of life is when our brains are working the hardest on learning to understand how language works. A child trained in two languages during that time will have a more inherent understanding of the relationship and differences between than someone who starts later in life” (Centeno; 2017)⁵⁰, “none of that means that bilingual education can’t start later. In fact, it’s

⁴⁶ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>

⁴⁷ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>

⁴⁸ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>

⁴⁹ https://books.google.it/books?id=Yg5OAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁵⁰ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

done exactly that way in many countries — children are raised speaking their native language at home, but begin education in English as early as kindergarten. By that age, children understand that a second language can be learned as a skill, rather than as an inherent part of their environment. It may come less naturally, but the same is true of anything your child learns at school. Adding a bilingual experience at home will only increase your child’s exposure to the second language and help them along, even if the process begins later in their life.” (Centeno, 2017)⁵¹

As a consequence, “in general, people become bilingual because life requires the use of two or more languages. This can be due to immigration, education, intermarriage, contact with other linguistic groups within a country, and so on.” (Grosjean, 2010)⁵²

Moreover, it is fundamental to acknowledge the fact that “it is the mastery of two languages that is the hallmark of being bilingual, not the environment in which a person is raised. If certain people are bilingual because they were raised by parents who spoke two different languages or in a country where their native language was not spoken, there are many other bilingual individuals with a different story: they studied the language and perfected their skills, participated in numerous language immersion programs in a foreign country, attended a bilingual school, etc.” (BISP, 2016)⁵³

j) “*Once you are bilingual you are always bilingual*” (Grosjean, 2010)⁵⁴:

This is not true. As a matter of fact, the phenomenon of *attrition* or *language erosion* might take place, after a period of *non-use* of that specific language. As we have previously explained, there are many circumstances which may lead to such situation: for instance, the loss of the language knowledge and skills developed at school after some years of non-practice, the emigration to another country where one’s own L1 is not spoken, and so on.

The bilingual child’s L1 might also be affected by some kind of language attrition, (in circumstances such as his / her family migration and subsequent stabilisation in another country), if his / her original language stops being spoken to him / her. This is an interesting point of discussion, that is, whether the child will still maintain his / her L1

⁵¹ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁵² https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

⁵³ <https://www.bilingualschoolparis.com/en/news/000087-5-misconceptions-about-bilingualism>

⁵⁴ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

knowledge (since he / she has learnt it since birth, therefore at the maximum moment of cognitive / linguistic brain potentials) or whether he will slightly / completely forget it as well.

k) “*Bilinguals have lower IQs than monolingual children*” (Grosjean, 2010)⁵⁵:

As we have reported at the beginning of the chapter, this assumption was based on erroneous (affected by many fallacies) tests directed to monolingual and bilingual individuals at the beginning of the last century. These studies, consequently, (from the 1960s and so on), were proved wrong, by demonstrating that the condition of bilingualism / plurilingualism, in reality, does not imply a disadvantage for the individual, but, on the other hand, many advantages (which will be discussed more in details in the next chapter).

l) “*Bilingualism causes “brain overload”*” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 2)⁵⁶:

This assumption is not real if we take into account the *plasticity of the brain* feature characterizing, in particular, the physiology of younger learners’ brains. As Maritiere Rodriguez Bellas (2014) affirms, indeed, “we know that language input starts from the very day a person is born, and the brain, given its plasticity, will adapt to whatever it is exposed to. The more stimuli, the better for the mind, and children can tell the difference between one language and another very soon. No confusion, ever.” (Rodriguez Bellas, 2014)⁵⁷

Moreover, Chin and Wigglesworth (2007) affirm that “a commonly held assumption is that speaking too many languages leads to speakers confusing one language with another, leading to the inability to learn any language successfully. Another assumption is that it is impossible to be good at two languages, and that one is likely to suffer should children insist on retaining, for example, the home language. While mathematical skills and musical skills are seen to enhance mental ability and, therefore, mental space, language learning has always been seen as something that occupies mental space. When it comes to languages, the brain is seen as a finite space for which language or languages must jostle for room. Unfortunately, this myth is something which has been perpetuated by bilingual researchers themselves.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 54)

⁵⁵ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

⁵⁶ See reference 22

⁵⁷ https://books.google.it/books?id=Yg5OAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

A reason for the existence of this myth could also be that “some adults feel that too many languages can cause “brain overload”, or undue stress on a child because they themselves find foreign languages stressful. Because of their age and motivation, parents approach the language learning experience on a completely different level than the child. This is due to social, psychological, and neurological reasons. Psychologically, as adults we are baffled by things children approach on the level of a game.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 2)

Moreover, adults could argue that “it is preferable to be “excellent in one language than to be mediocre in several”, as if there were a single pie for language and it would have to be divided if more than one language were present.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 2) However, this claim “is false because, first, we know that bilinguals actually store their languages in different (though sometime overlapping) areas of the brain. Second, a bilingual with poor verbal expression would have probably been a monolingual with poor verbal expression; some individuals just have poorer verbal skills than others.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 2)

m) “*All people use the same area of the brain to speak languages*” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 2-9)⁵⁸:

This is not true, since we know that the *lateralisation* with respect to *language acquisition* differs according to many factors: the moment of language acquisition (early or late acquisition of an L2, therefore *simultaneous* and *successive bilingualism*), one’s own cognitive / linguistic lateralisation of the brain (in association with the use of the left / right hand), etc.

In general, research has demonstrated that “most of the world’s population has the primary language area in the left frontal and parietal lobes of the brain. This is true for 95 percent of right-handed people and 70 percent of left-handed people (the rest have their primary language area either spread bilaterally – over the left and right hemisphere – or are right-hemisphere dominant for languages). Research in the late 1970s and early 1980s shows that languages learned at different times in one’s life are stored in different areas of the brain. The right hemisphere plays a much larger role in language processing in multilinguals than in monolinguals, according to studies being conducted at the University of Basel in Switzerland. So, physically speaking, second languages do not encroach on the first language’s brain space nor on one’s potential for fluency.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 2-4)

Moreover, “if someone learns two languages from birth, he effectively has his main language area in the same place as a monolingual (the left frontal and parietal lobes) because all

⁵⁸ See reference 22

languages are treated as the “first” language. If a person learns a foreign language after nine months of age, however, there is a greater cross-lateralization of language abilities; that is, there is more use of the right hemisphere by bilinguals who learn their languages after the age of nine months. Additionally, people who learn more than one foreign language (they have learned three, four, five, six, or more) have those languages in different (though often overlapping) areas of the brain.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 9)

In conclusion, therefore, “depending on the age at which a person learns a language, and in which hemisphere he or she is dominant for languages, first, second, and subsequent languages are housed in different places.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 9)

n) *“Bilingualism will delay language acquisition in children”* (Grosjean; 2010)⁵⁹:

This assumption is wrong, and the reason of it was explained in the previous chapter. Specifically, bilingual / plurilingual children are not delayed with respect to language acquisition, compared to their monolingual peers. Even if they do start producing words around the age of 15-20 months, this stage would not be considered “delayed”, according to monolingual linguistic production standards.

When analysing bilingual / plurilingual individuals’ productions, moreover, two different linguistic systems have to be taken into account. Indeed, these people constantly have to deal with a “two-models / two-languages kind of system”, hence this mechanism might constitute the main cause of such slightly delayed production of words. What is important to note, here, is the fact that it is because they have to choose between more elements, that their production will seem delayed compared to the monolinguals’ one, and not because of cognitive / linguistic / intellectual delays or disabilities.

As Chin and Wigglesworth (2007) have pointed out, as a matter of fact, “over the years, it has been claimed that in terms of vocabulary acquisition, bilinguals lag behind monolinguals but they catch up at a later age, an assumption that is negated when we cease to see bilinguals as two composite monolinguals.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 55)

In general, therefore, it is established that “milestones of pre-language development are the same in all languages. Like other children, most bilingual children speak their first words by age one (i.e., mama, dada). By age two, most bilingual children can use two-word phrases (i.e., my ball, no juice). These are the same developmental milestones for children who learn only one

⁵⁹ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/myths_en.html

language. A bilingual toddler might mix parts of a word from one language with parts from another language. While this might make it more difficult for others to understand the child's meaning, it is not a reflection of abnormal or delayed development. The total number of words (the sum of words from both languages the child is learning) should be comparable to the number used by a child the same age speaking one language.” (American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017)⁶⁰

Moreover, “the reality is that language delay is common in all children. It’s one of the most common developmental delays in early childhood, in fact. Because it can be difficult to explain, many people tend to jump to the conclusion that a bilingual child’s speech is delayed because he or she is learning two languages, even in the absence of any evidence to support the connection.” (Centeno, 2017)⁶¹

In other words, “some adults see children with “too many” languages as being slower than their peers when it comes to academics. Bilingualism is an easy target when problems arise at school. It is true that multilinguals begin speaking slightly later than their monolingual counterparts. It is also true that a number of multilinguals tend to hesitate before answering a question, and may appear to be grasping for an answer when in reality they may know the answer but lack the vocabulary to express it. This is a matter of learning words, not a question of comprehending the subject matter. On measures of creativity and innovation in problem solving, multilinguals have been shown to be superior to monolinguals (Ricciardelli 1992), perhaps due to the necessity to approach problems from many angles and their tendency to view situations on various levels for full comprehension as a result of the tools a second language provides them with.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 2-4)

In conclusion, “there’s no reason to break off bilingual education because a child seems to be slow in developing spoken communication. Children’s brains acquire different skills at different times, and the differences can be striking — as much as a year’s gap between one child’s progress and another’s, with no effect on either child’s education later in life. Stopping a bilingual education once it’s in progress may even be harmful or confusing for the child — it removes half of his or her small vocabulary in a single stroke, with no explanation.” (Centeno, 2017)⁶²

⁶⁰ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>

⁶¹ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁶² <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

- o) *“A bilingual kid’s cognitive development will be negatively affected”* (Rodriguez Bellas, 2014)⁶³ / *“Speaking two languages to your child may cause a speech or language disorder”* (American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017)⁶⁴:

This is obviously fake, since many advantages are actually reported (and proved) when bilingualism / plurilingualism is taken into account. As Rodriguez Bellas affirms in *“Raising Bilingual Children”* (2014), “many studies show the contrary effect, and it stands to reason, because the two-language children have the advantage over one-language children, who have only one communication tool and thus less stimulus for neuronal development. This misconception has deprived millions in the United States of the blessings of two-language education.” (Roriguez Bellas, 2014)⁶⁵

Moreover, “contrary to the idea that two languages confuse people, there is evidence that well-developed bilingualism actually enhances one's "cognitive flexibility" -- that is, bilingual people (including children) are better able to see things from two or more perspectives and to understand how other people think. (Hakuta, 1986). Bilinguals also have better auditory language skills (i.e., they can discriminate sounds of a language more finely) than monolinguals, and they mature earlier than monolinguals in terms of linguistic abstraction (i.e., ability to think and talk about language). (Albert and Obler, 1978, cited in Cummins, 1994).” (Center for Second Language Research, University of Hawaii, Manoa)⁶⁶

In general, therefore, we have to acknowledge the fact that, as reported by the American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2017), “if a bilingual child has a speech or language problem, it will show up in both languages. However, these problems are not caused by learning two languages. Bilingualism should almost never be used as an explanation for speech or language disorder.” (American Academy of Pediatrics and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017)⁶⁷

⁶³https://books.google.it/books?id=Yg5OAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁶⁴ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>

⁶⁵https://books.google.it/books?id=Yg5OAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁶⁶ <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/bilingtl/myths.html>

⁶⁷ <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>

To conclude, when immigrant children at school seem to be delayed or “disabled” with respect to language production, we should not consider this evidence as a cognitive / developmental problem, but, on the other hand, we should analyse it under a different light.

Indeed, “many people fail to realize that there are different levels of language proficiency. The language needed for face-to-face communication takes less time to master than the language needed to perform in cognitively demanding situations such as classes and lectures. It takes a child about 2 years to develop the ability to communicate in a second language on the playground, but it takes 5-7 years to develop age-appropriate academic language. Many immigrant children have been misdiagnosed in the past as “learning disabled,” when in fact the problem was that people misunderstood their fluency on the playground, thinking that it meant they should be able to perform in class as well. Actually, they still needed time and assistance to develop their academic English skills (Cummins, 1994).” (Center for Second Language Research, University of Hawaii, Manoa)⁶⁸

p) *“Children need to be super smart to grow up bilingual”* (Centeno, 2017)⁶⁹:

This, as Olena Centeno claims in “Nine Myths That Are Crippling Your Kids” (2017), is not true at all, since “any child can be bilingual” (Centeno, 2017)⁷⁰. Moreover, “if this myth were true it’d be hard to convince anyone to start bilingual education early, since there’s not a lot of ways to tell if a pre-verbal infant is “linguistically gifted” or not. The fact of the matter is that children are born prepared to learn languages. Pre-verbal infants begin reacting to different languages in different ways as early as four days after birth. No special gift is needed — a young brain is more of an advantage in learning languages than any natural aptitude. Some individuals will certainly show greater ease with learning new languages later in life. It’s a talent just like any other. But it takes time for those mental aptitudes to develop and manifest, and they don’t impact early childhood bilingual education. Exposure to and stimulation in multiple languages is all a young brain needs to begin learning multiple languages at once.” (Centeno, 2017)⁷¹

⁶⁸<https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/bilingtl/myths.html>

⁶⁹ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁷⁰ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁷¹ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

q) “*Children absorb languages naturally. All you have to do is speak to them*” (Centeno, 2017)⁷²:

This assumption is only partly true, because “children do absorb languages naturally by listening to them. But if all they do is listen, their fluency will quickly become passive.” (Centeno, 2017)⁷³

As a matter of fact, it is known that “true fluency in multiple languages requires both exposure and use” (Centeno, 2017)⁷⁴, therefore, “children have to be encouraged to use their second language to get the things they want, or they will develop an instinctive understanding that their primary language is sufficient on its own.” (Centeno, 2017)⁷⁵

In order for this to happen, it is essential that parents speak both their languages to their offspring, hence stimulating both their comprehension and production according to a double-linguistic system. As a consequence, this *bilingual boost*, which would also be empowered by giving them “games, books, and other forms of entertainment that require the use of their secondary language” (Centeno, 2017)⁷⁶, will make them “seek true fluency rather than passive understanding in it.” (Centeno, 2017)⁷⁷

On the contrary, if parents speak one and only language to their children (without considering the official language of the country), these children would probably not develop an adequate *productive* linguistic knowledge / abilities in the other, dominant language.

r) “*Some languages are easier to learn than others*” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 4):

It is for this (false) reason that adults might seem discouraged from the idea of raising their child bilingually (or actually learning an L2 themselves). Indeed, “as adults, we see a clear division between languages that are easy (often the Latin or Romance languages of Spanish, French, Italian or Portuguese) versus languages that are difficult (those with unrecognizable sounds and a different writing system, such as Arabic, Chinese and Thai).

⁷² <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁷³ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁷⁴ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁷⁵ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁷⁶ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁷⁷ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

However, to an infant bilingual, there is no such distinction. No language is easier or harder for an infant to learn. If this were not the case, then in a kind of Darwinian response, all the “hard” languages would die out because no one would bother to learn them (Pinker 1994). Children learn all parts of speech of all languages around the world with an uncanny universal timetable, generally mastering all points of grammar by four, and reading well by eight years old (Slobin 1992). To a child, no particular language is harder than any other.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 4)

As a consequence, therefore, it is nonsense to think that a language is harder to learn than another one, (when a child’s linguistic acquisition is taken into account). As long as the *linguistic input* is *comprehensible* and *processable*, the child will learn it without any difficulty.

s) “*Some children refuse to learn two languages and prefer one over the other*” (Rodriguez Bellas, 2014)⁷⁸:

It might happen that a child has a preference towards a language and not towards the other, but this *choice / affiliation* may characterise many and other types of circumstances: a child might not like to go to school, but still he / she will have to go until the end of the academic cycle; he / she might not like to eat healthy, but his / her parents will make him / her do it for his / her own health sake, etc.

In other words, as Rodriguez Bellas affirms in “Raising bilingual children, a practical guide” (2014), “if the situation does occur, it is up to the parents and teachers to stick to their plan and use both languages no matter what resistance they encounter.” (Rodriguez Bellas, 2014)⁷⁹

t) “*You are better off learning one language first and then the second one*” (BISP, 2016)⁸⁰:

This assumption rises from the misconception of what the mechanism of *code-mixing / code-switching* is. Since many bilingual / plurilingual children make these forms of mixing while speaking with other bilingual / plurilingual individuals, monolingual

⁷⁸https://books.google.it/books?id=Yg5OAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁷⁹https://books.google.it/books?id=Yg5OAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁸⁰ <https://www.bilingualschoolparis.com/en/news/000087-5-misconceptions-about-bilingualism>

speakers or simply common people consider such phenomena as evidences of confusion and inability to properly speak that language. As we have demonstrated in the previous chapter, though, these code-mixings / code-switchings happen for different reasons, and do not mean that the bilingual / plurilingual child will not be able to acquire his / her language(s) as a monolingual would do.

In a certain sense, “the developmental phases involved in learning the two languages will certainly imply some mixing, but this is to be interpreted as creative in nature, and not confusion. In later phases the child will know how to not mix the two languages when confronted with both bilingual and monolingual situations. As an example, take French Canadians who integrate English language elements into their French, all while having perfectly integrated the differences that exist between the two languages.” (BISP, 2016)⁸¹

u) *“If parents want their children to grow up bilingual, they should use the one person – one language approach”*(Grosjean, 2010)⁸²:

This is not the only modality through which a child can be taught two or more languages since birth (or early in life). Indeed, many other options are available, such as: the presence of a caretaker who teaches (simply speaking to) the child one language, which is used inside the home; the presence of another caretaker whose job is to accompany the child’s linguistic acquisition of the official language, therefore the one used outside the home environment, at school, in the playground, etc.

What is essential, given any circumstance, is the fact that the child should feel the *need* to know both languages, in order to interact with his / her family and outer people. As Grosjean affirms in one of his essays (2010), as a matter of fact, is that “the child must come to realize, most of the time unconsciously, that he / she needs two or more languages in everyday life. This is where the one person - one language approach often breaks down as the bilingual child quickly realizes that the weaker (often minority) language is not really needed (the caretakers or other family members often speak the other, stronger language, to one another, so why keep up the weaker language?).” (Grosjean, 2010)⁸³

⁸¹ <https://www.bilingualschoolparis.com/en/news/000087-5-misconceptions-about-bilingualism>

⁸² https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/myths_en.html

⁸³ https://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/bilingualism_is_not_en.html

- v) “*Parents must be fluent in a language to raise their child speaking it*” (Centeno, 2017)⁸⁴:

This is not true, if we consider the child’s brain potential with respect to the L2 learning. For instance, when a family emigrates from a country to another, it might be a struggle for the parents to learn the new language, especially when this one is extremely different from their mother tongue (see Chinese immigrants moving to Italy, for example). Their difficulty is due, in the majority of the cases, to their loss of brain plasticity which, on the other hand, characterises the child’s brain physiology.

Their children, consequently, especially if they are very young (less than 3 years old) will learn Italian in a very rapid and efficient way, even if their parents cannot give them enough L2 inputs in order for the linguistic acquisition to take place.

As Centeno (2017) affirms, “many immigrant families arrive with small children and no one in the household speaking more than a word or two of the new dominant language. The child will quickly learn bilingually, even if the parents struggle to acquire the new language themselves. (...) Parents who don’t have the advantage of being surrounded by a second language can still raise a bilingual child. It usually means learning some of the language yourself, but it also requires outside stimulation from people who speak the second language fluently. (...) Movies, books, and especially visits to places where people speak the second language will help a child’s bilingual development move along even as the parents struggle to acquire a bit of the second language themselves.” (Centeno, 2017)⁸⁵

- w) “*The older a person is, the harder it is to acquire a second language*” (Center for Second Language Research, University of Hawaii, Manoa)⁸⁶:

This assumption is partly true, if the only *age* factor is taken into account, when discussing about bilingualism / plurilingualism. In that case, as we have demonstrated so far, it is certainly better *to be born bilingual*, or *to be raised bilingual* since early in life, than to start learning an L2 at a later stage, because of children cognitive advantages (with respect to brain plasticity).

On the other hand, however, an efficient linguistic acquisition may depend on many factors, such as “motivation, attitudes toward the two languages, social context, and the

⁸⁴ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/why-raise-bilingual/>

⁸⁵ <https://bilingualkidsrock.com/nine-bilingual-myths/>

⁸⁶ <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/bilingtl/myths.html>

learning environment itself.” (Center for Second Language Research, University of Hawaii, Manoa)⁸⁷

Researchers in the Centre for Second Language Research in Manoa (Hawaii), indeed, have stated that “different locations in the human brain are responsible for different language learning tasks. Some of these tasks, like acquiring native-like pronunciation in a second language, are easier for children. This doesn't mean it's impossible for adult learners to sound "native-like" - it may just be more difficult. Other language learning tasks, like acquiring grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and literacy, are easier for older learners because they already have developed proficiency in these areas in their native language, and this language ability "transfers" to another language. Older immigrant students whose native language literacy skills are well developed acquire English proficiency significantly faster than younger immigrant students.” (Cummins, 1994)” (Center for Second Language Research, University of Hawaii, Manoa)⁸⁸

In conclusion, therefore, we cannot affirm the trueness of this assumption, since it reflects just a small part of what is needed to achieve a bilingual proficiency / accuracy level (at all levels of language knowledge and capacities).

⁸⁷ <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/bilingtl/myths.html>

⁸⁸ <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/540/bilingtl/myths.html>

5. Advantages of Bilingualism

5.1. The Establishment and Consolidation of the Bilingual / Plurilingual Advantages: a series of Studies and Evidences

Now that we have established all the fallacies underneath the many worldwide existent false myths regarding bilingualism / plurilingualism, we may as well introduce the concept of “*advantages of bilingualism*”.

Indeed, since the 1960s, precisely since Peal and Lambert’s study on bilingualism (1962), there has been a shift of attention from the original belief of *disapprovement* towards bilingual education (given its assumed detrimental effects on cognitive functioning) to a general positive belief of *approvement* and *sustainment* towards this aspect of reality.

First of all, we have to acknowledge the fact that “being bilingual, multilingual or monolingual is likely to affect a child’s identity, networks of friends and acquaintances, schooling, employment, marriage, preferred area of residence, travel and thinking” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 11-12), therefore, each of these instances should be sustained by the individual’s family because they will certainly affect all aspects of his / her life.

Being bilingual / plurilingual, moreover, could definitely improve one’s own life choices and life styles, given the major amount of opportunities and possibilities in society: as a consequence, we can affirm that, compared to a few (if not zero) amount of disadvantages related to such circumstances, bilingualism / plurilingualism is a condition which *does* and *will* always carry innumerable (and of different nature) advantages for the individual.

As claimed before, the year 1962 stated a *watershed* moment in *bilingual / plurilingual research*. Many years before that, although, in 1949, another researcher named Werner Leopold had documented a *first-time case study* of a *bilingual individual* (actually, even prior to that, there was another attempt, that of Ronjat (1913), to describe his experience of raising his son Louis bilingual: this account, though, was not taken into consideration at all, given the historical / cultural moment and this being, pragmatically, a more anecdotal and less methodical work compared to Leopold’s one).

Specifically, Leopold observed his bilingual (English and German) daughter Hildegard Rose's behaviour with respect to language functions: evident as it was, "she was precociously aware of rhymes and would deliberately destroy rhymes in word play" (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 58-59), thus leading Leopold to claim "that bilinguals were able to detach sound from meaning because of the constant early exposure to two languages." (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 58-59)

This apparent *metalinguistic awareness* that Hildegard was demonstrating through common daily-basis linguistic acts, indeed, proved to her father the fact that bilingual individuals are in a position of advantage over monolingual ones, since "from a very young age a bilingual child is constantly aware of two competing forms for one meaning." (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 58-59)

However, this one and only study pointing to the effective *benefits of bilinguality / plurilinguality*, was bound to have little, if no effect among general beliefs: this was due to the vast amount of literature present in society around the same time, which was claiming the exact opposite hypothesis according to such field.

Consequently, as initially stated, the date 1962 is to be taken into account when considering the real, actual moment of *shift* among *beliefs* and *researches*.

Precisely, "Peal and Lambert's (1962) study, which re-examined the issue of relationship of bilingualism to intelligence" (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 58-59), established that bilingual individuals were *superior* to monolingual ones, as far as the concept of *cognitive flexibility* is concerned with. Indeed, bilinguals who were being tested along with monolingual peers, would score higher grades than the last ones in *non-verbal, problem-solving* and *creativity tasks*, thus demonstrating their innate ability of "*building more complex and sophisticated hypothesis*", as Bonifacci (2018: 29-30) would claim.

Moreover, other advantages were also discovered according to bilinguals' *anticipatory skills* in linguistic tasks, as well as to various circumstances which demolished the many previously-claimed myths on bilingualism / plurilinguism. This *bilingual / plurilingual advantage*, overall, has also been studied with the auxilium of the *Theory of the Mind* (Goetz, 2003, Kovacs, 2009; Nguyen, Astington, 2014), which helped enormously in the attempt of deconstructing these false myths on bilingualism / plurilinguism, thus giving "new lights" and sources to such research.

With respect to the *pragmatic results* of Peal and Lambert's (1962) tests, indeed, "bilinguals were found to be better in the symbolic manipulation types of non-verbal tasks but performed the same as the monolinguals in the non-verbal tasks requiring spatial and perceptual processes." (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 60) This ability, which they defined as characterised by a "*mental or cognitive flexibility*", therefore, demonstrated / sustained Leopold's initial hypothesis based on his daughter's linguistic abilities / proficiency: namely, "bilinguals' early awareness of two different codes, and their ability to associate two words with one object, may have enhanced the development of an increased cognitive flexibility." (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 60)

However, this founding did not mean that "*to be a bilingual, one has to have a high level of intelligence*": on the contrary, as it was explained in the previous chapter, this is a well-known and false myth, which has already been demolished by many studies and evidences. All in all, as a consequence, Peal and Lambert's (1962) study mainly demonstrated that the condition of one's own bilingualism may facilitate / constitute an advantage with respect to its own *verbal* and *non-verbal abilities*.

Specifically, they claimed that "intellectually (the bilingual's) experience with two language systems seems to have left him with a mental flexibility, a superiority in concept formation, and a more diversified set of mental abilities, in the sense that the patterns of abilities developed by bilinguals were more heterogeneous." (Saunders, 1988: 16) Moreover, given such instances, they established that "it is not possible to state from the present study whether the more intelligent child became bilingual or whether bilingualism aided his intellectual development, but there is no question about the fact that he is superior intellectually. In contrast, the monolingual appears to have a more unitary structure of intelligence which he must use for all types of intellectual tasks." (Saunders, 1988: 16)

In conclusion, as Chin and Wigglesworth affirm in "Bilingualism, an advanced resourced book" (2007), we can see why "Peal and Lambert's study is extremely significant" (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 60), this is "because it gave the next generation of researchers the ideological backdrop underpinning the methodological guidelines with which to investigate more rigorously the relationship between bilingualism and the mind." (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 60)

Indeed, it is not surprising that a series of other studies and researches were carried on after this first fundamental one. In particular, "since 1965, a stream of papers have highlighted the positive effects of bilingualism and marked a change in research focus"

(Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 61): therefore, “instead of making a general search for IQ superiority, the new generation of researchers have been far more specific in their enquiry.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 61)

Consequently, “various researchers found that bilinguals were superior to monolinguals on tasks requiring *cognitive flexibility* and *metalinguistic awareness*, while others argued that special conditions have to exist before bilinguals can enjoy the cognitive benefits. These conditions are usually related to the level of proficiency attained in the two languages.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 61)

As far as such *level of proficiency* is concerned with, moreover, researchers such as Hakuta and Diaz “presented findings which conclusively supported the hypothesis that it is bilingual proficiency that exerts an influence on cognitive functioning and not the other way round.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 60)

On the other hand, there have been many other studies and attempts to delineating the overall bilinguals’ / plurilinguals’ advantages in relation to society (at all levels of it). Some of these researchers, such as Lucrecia Santibanez and Maria Estela Zarate in their essay “Bilinguals in the US and College Enrollment”, claimed that “significant evidence has emerged that attests to the cognitive benefits of learning two languages and the positive association between learning another language early on and success in academic subjects.” (Santibanez, Zarate, 2014: 9-10) More specifically, the two researchers analysed such cognitive advantages in terms of “improved working memory in younger bilinguals, superior executive control and better selective attention.” (Santibanez, Zarate, 2014: 9-10)

Overall, their statement was that bilinguals’ / plurilinguals’ “working memory skills are positively associated with skills and knowledge in mathematics and reading comprehension” (Santibanez, Zarate, 2014: 9-10) and that such “*working memory training*” could also be translated into *comprehension of written material* (McClelland et al., (2008)).

On another level, it was also claimed that “being bilingual demonstrates social benefits for youth that lead to more stable and successful academic trajectories” (Santibanez, Zarate, 2014: 9-10): indeed, it seems obvious that immigrant students (or workers) who do know more than one language, (therefore being able to communicate with the vast majority of the world population belonging to different social / professional fields as

well), will most likely develop “broader social networks and have more stable perceptions of ethnic identity.” (Santibanez, Zarate, 2014: 9-10)

Nonetheless, such individuals will inevitably “appear to be more adept at negotiating social networks with other adults, including teachers, and such local / global connections will ultimately increase access to homework help, job, career and educational information.” (Santibanez, Zarate, 2014: 9-10)

In general, however, we need to differentiate several “*stages*” of research, since every decade (starting from the 60s) has been characterized by a particular focus on bilingual / plurilingual research.

Specifically, as Diane Rodriguez *et al.* claim in “The bilingual advantage. Promoting academic development, biliteracy, and native language in the classroom” (2014), “in the 1970s, research began to identify evidence of bilingual effects on *metalinguistic awareness* and *cognitive development*, specifically on how the learning of two languages in childhood changed the way in which children thought about language. Later on, during the 1980s and 1990s, another line of research examined the effect of bilingualism on *school achievement*, in particular on *literacy* and *academic achievement*. Since the 2000s, research has also looked at the effect of bilingualism on *executive function*.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 9)

Therefore, we can notice that several and different typologies of *advantages* were highlighted in relation to the condition of bilingualism / plurilingualism, according to many factors, such as researchers, historical / political / cultural circumstances, social needs, etc.

Overall, in any way, bilinguals / plurilinguals were seen (at that time, but also nowadays) by the majority of researchers and professionals in the field, as individuals in a position of advantage in terms of “metalinguistic awareness, cognitive development, academic achievement, and cross-cultural awareness and understanding.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 9)

In addition, it has been established that they do “perform better in tasks requiring cognitive flexibility and are also superior in certain metalinguistic skills, though this last observation is not universally held, nor is it drawn from studies which are methodologically flawless” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 69-70), and that (Graffi, Scalise, 2002: 297) bilingual children are also able to simultaneously manage more activities (in contrast to monolingual children), whereas bilingual adults are seen as less likely (in terms of human rates /

percentage of possibilities in a life-time), to be affected by the Alzheimer syndrome or common cognitive aging.

With respect to the *childhood – adulthood* differentiation according to bilingualism / plurilingualism traits, hence, it was discovered and reported by Bonifacci in “I bambini bilingui. Favorire gli apprendimenti nelle classi multiculturali” (2018), that “le competenze associate alle funzioni esecutive, ovvero in compiti che richiedono attenzione sostenuta o selettiva e controllo cognitivo, sembrano svilupparsi più precocemente nei bambini bilingui. Questo vantaggio non riguarderebbe invece gli aspetti di rappresentazione, ovvero gli aspetti analitici e la rappresentazione delle conoscenze (Bialystok, 2001; Bialystok, Martin, 2004).”⁸⁹ (Bonifacci, 2018: 31-32)

Moreover, the bilingual / plurilingual advantage was also found to be more *influential* at specific stages of life of an individual: precisely, during *childhood*, when one’s own cognitive system is not fully developed, or during *senescence*, when, on the other hand, one’s own cognitive system is less efficient compared to the previous ages of his / her life.

In general, although, despite these inner differentiations in relation to *bilingual / plurilingual advantages* and their inner / inherent *stages of major influence*, we can assume (on the base of fundamental studies, such as the one proposed by Bonifacci (2018)), that “il bilinguismo costituisca un possibile fattore protettivo per lo sviluppo cognitivo, anche in bambini provenienti da contesti socioculturali svantaggiati. (...) Queste evidenze, insieme ad altre (...) sostengono l’importanza di valorizzare la condizione di bilinguismo anche attraverso il mantenimento della L1.”⁹⁰ (Bonifacci, 2018: 34)

In conclusion, it is due to many fundamental studies, researches, and inquiries, that nowadays we can firmly establish the existence of the main important advantages (which will be discussed in details in the following sub-chapters) of bilingualism / plurilingualism, namely:

⁸⁹ “the competences associated with executive functions, that is in tasks requiring sustained or selective attention and cognitive control, seem to develop earlier in bilingual children. This advantage, on the other hand, would not concern the aspects of representation, i.e. the analytical aspects and the representation of knowledge.”

⁹⁰ “bilingualism is a possible protective factor for cognitive development, even in children from disadvantaged socio-cultural contexts. (...) These evidences, along with others (...) support the importance of enhancing the condition of bilingualism also through the maintenance of L1. ”

- a) Cognitive and metalinguistic advantages, such as *“greater adeptness at evaluating non-empirical contradictory statements, greater adeptness at divergent thinking, greater adeptness at creative thinking, greater linguistic and cognitive creativity, greater facility at concept formation, earlier and greater awareness of the arbitrariness of language, earlier separation of meaning from sound”* (Saunders, 1988: 18-20), etc.
- b) Communication advantages, such as *communication sensitivity, ability to learn multiple languages, “wider communication (extended family, community, international links, employment), literacy in two languages”* (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 12), etc.
- c) Social advantages, such as *socioeconomic benefits, global and local interactions, potentialising acts of identities*, etc.
- d) Cultural advantages, such as *cultural / intercultural awareness, “broader enculturation, deeper multiculturalism, two “language worlds” of experience, greater tolerance and less racism”* (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 12), etc.
- e) “Character advantages, such as *raised self-esteem, security in identity”* (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 12), etc.
- f) “Curriculum advantages, such as *increased curriculum achievement, ease in learning a third language”* (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 12), etc.

5.2. Cognitive Advantages of Bilingualism

Since Peal and Lambert’s (1962) study, therefore, many *cognitive advantages* have been affirmed with respect to bilingualism / plurilingualism.

Indeed, given the fact that “the bilingual ten-year-olds included in Peal and Lambert’s study in Montreal outperformed the monolingual children in verbal and non-verbal intelligence tests, leading the authors to conclude that bilingual children “are more facile at concept formation, and have greater mental flexibility (1962: 22)” (Garcia,

2009)⁹¹, it seems obvious to conclude that such instance represents an evidence of *cognitive bilingual / plurilingual advantage*.

However, it must be reminded that the two researchers cited above did not took a position “whether the more intelligent child became bilingual or whether bilingualism aided his intellectual development (1962: 29)” (Garcia, 2009)⁹², thus leaving out a concrete and open space for future research to the next-generation elite of researchers.

Specifically, when we talk about “*cognitive advantages of bilingualism*”, we are referring to two main aspects of such condition: *mind development* and *executive function*.

As far as the first concept is concerned with, that of “*mind development*”, we might as well reference it to Bialystok and Hakuta’s (1994) claim, namely that “the benefits from being bilingual go much further than simply knowing two languages. According to them, the structures and thoughts of the two languages are so different, it forces the child to think in more complex ways than learning only in one language.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 10-11)

Another study was conducted by Goetz (2003), who “found that bilingual children performed better (had the ability to learn successfully) than monolinguals, and he attributed their success to better inhibitory control, stronger metalinguistic skills, and a greater sociological understanding than their monolingual counterparts.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 10-11)

In addition, we have to remind that the concept of *mind development* also links to that of *divergent thinking*: as a matter of fact, bilinguals / plurilinguals who have more than one word at their disposal for anything they want / need to refer to, will develop that “ability to generate multiple associations from one concept, or the ability to mentally reorganize the elements of a problem or situation” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 61), which, all in all, is part of a more general ability (typical of bilinguals / plurilinguals), named “*cognitive flexibility*” (meaning, in this sense, *creativity* along with the *ability of divergent thinking*).

⁹¹https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

⁹²https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

Such ability to “*think divergently*” had firstly been observed by Vygotsky (1930s) on bilingual children: these ones, having “two ways to describe the world and thus more flexible perceptions and interpretations” (Garcia, 2009)⁹³, represented the ideal examples of human beings who are able “to come up with more innovative solutions to problems, able to think with creativity and flexibility.” (Garcia, 2009)⁹⁴

In conclusion, therefore, we might assume that “bilingualism also promotes divergent and creative thinking. A creative and divergent individual is one who thinks imaginatively, is an open and free thinker, and who is able to see more than one possible solution to a given task.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 10) “Consequently, the link between a word and its concept is usually looser. (...) Sometimes corresponding words in different languages carry different connotations. (...) When each word carries slightly different associations, bilinguals may be able to think more fluently, flexibly and creatively.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 14)

This idea is also sustained by Carringer (1974), who claims that “bilingualism does promote creative thinking abilities and at least in part serves to free the mind from the tyranny of words. Since the bilingual has two terms for one referent, his attention is focused on ideas and not words, on content rather than form, on meaning rather than symbol, and this is very important in the intellectual process as it permits greater cognitive flexibility.” (Saunders, 1988: 19)

On the other hand, as far as the “*executive functioning*” concept is concerned with, such ability is seen as (Diamond, 2002) being “the basis for higher thought, including control of attention, working memory, and multitasking, involving processes of attention, selection, inhibition, shifting, and flexibility that are at the center of all higher thought.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 10-11)

Specifically, as Rodriguez *et al.* claim in “The bilingual advantage. Promoting academic development, biliteracy, and native language in the classroom” (2014), “it has been found that bilingual children are superior to monolingual children on measures of cognitive control of linguistic processes, and that they develop control over executive processes earlier than monolingual children. Advantages to bilingual executive function can be seen on verbal and nonverbal tasks and processes. For instance, Bialystok (1999) conducted a study with bilingual and monolingual children with receptive vocabulary and memory span, and these children were

⁹³https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

⁹⁴https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

asked to perform the dimensional change card sort task and the moving word task. Bilingual children outperformed their monolingual peers on both tasks.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 10-11)

In conclusion, therefore, with respects to all aspects and inherent traits relative to the *cognitive advantages* of bilingualism / plurilingualism, we might resume them by listing the following ones: “reconstruction of a perceptual situation, verbal and nonverbal intelligence, verbal originality, verbal divergence, semantic relations, Piagetian concept formation, divergent thinking, nonverbal perceptual tasks, verbal transformation and symbol substitution, and a variety of metalinguistic tasks.” (Harris, 1992: 501)

5.2.1. Metalinguistic Awareness

Another important concept linked to the cognitive benefits of bilingualism / plurilingualism is that of *metalinguistic awareness*.

The first researcher inquiring on this matter was Vygotsky who, in 1934, “noted that children’s knowledge of two language systems resulted in greater linguistic awareness and linguistic flexibility.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62) Specifically, he “explained that being able to express the same thought in different languages enables the child to “see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations.” (Vygotsky, 1962: 110)” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62)

Moreover, he stated that “bilingual children’s ability to use two languages makes language structures more visible as children have to organize their two language systems. It is as if bilingualism provides x-ray vision, allowing the children to conceptualize underlying structures and to incorporate them into one functioning communicative system (Bialystok, 2004). Thus, bilingual children develop a more analytic orientation to language, in other words, greater *metalinguistic awareness*.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62)

Consequently, other professionals in the field made several studies in order to analyse and better explain such common bilingual / plurilingual “*skill*”: one of these was Leopold (1949), who explained that “bilinguals have an advantage when it comes to analysing the language forms owing to their early exposure to two different linguistic codes, since such exposure promotes a more *analytic orientation* to linguistic operations. As a result,

bilinguals are metalinguistically more aware than monolinguals.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62)

This phenomenon, in particular, was also observed by Cummins (1977), who defined it “as the development of children’s awareness of certain properties of language including their ability to analyse linguistic input.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62)

Overall, therefore, we might establish what the concept of *metalinguistic awareness* (with respect to bilinguals’ / plurilinguals’ condition) precisely means. Many definitions have been made, such as:

- a) “metalinguistic awareness is the ability to treat language as an object of thought.” (Garcia, 2009)⁹⁵
- b) “it is to look at language “with the mind’s eye and taken apart.” (Tunmer *et al.*; 1984: 12)” (Garcia, 2009)⁹⁶
- c) “the ability to make language forms opaque and attend to them in and for themselves.” (Cazden; 1972)” (Garcia, 2009)⁹⁷

More specifically, it refers to “the ability to focus on different levels of linguistic structures such as words, phonemes and syntax” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62), as well as “to the process of using language as an object of thought; the ability to reflect upon and manipulate structures of spoken language. It is the explicit knowledge of linguistic structure and the ability to access it intentionally.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 9-10)

In particular, Rodriguez *et al.* in “The bilingual advantage. Promoting academic development, biliteracy, and native language in the classroom” (2014) claim that “such abilities are crucial to children’s development of complex uses of language and the acquisition of literacy. Metalinguistic awareness relies mainly on two skill components: analysis of linguistic knowledge and control of attention processes. Research suggests that bilinguals, in contrast to monolinguals, are more metalinguistically aware and divergent thinkers. A

⁹⁵https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

⁹⁶https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

⁹⁷https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

heightened awareness of meaning of language and structure leads to a more analytical orientation toward language.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 9-10)

In conclusion, therefore, according to their point of view, since “bilingual children receive more linguistic input, requiring a greater amount of linguistic analysis to understand it” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 9-10), they will inevitably develop a more complex understanding of the single words of each language at a younger age, thus stimulating such *metalinguistic awareness* (in contrast to their monolingual peers, who are “often satisfied with a hazy definition of a word and will use it without understanding it fully” (Saunders, 1988: 18)).

This was also found in experiments such as Cummins and Mulcahy’s (1978) one, who “compared students from three language groups, monolinguals plus bilinguals, on a set of metalinguistic tasks to assess their ability to analyse linguistic structures and detect ambiguities, and to understand the arbitrary nature of linguistic labels. They found that bilingual children performed better than the monolinguals on most tasks.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 9-10)

Bialystok (1988), on the other hand, “compared monolingual and bilingual children, and she found that bilingual children had better control of linguistic processing than monolinguals, and that those bilingual children with higher proficiency in their second language had better analytical skills than the children of lower proficiency.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 9-10)

To conclude, as far as the original definition of *metalinguistic awareness* is concerned with, we cannot forget that it is to be divided into 5 sub-components, namely: *word awareness*, *phonological awareness*, *sentence awareness* and *semantic awareness*.

Specifically, as Chin and Wigglesworth define these concepts in “Bilingualism, an advanced resourced book” (2007):

- a) *Word awareness* is “the ability to recognize that the speech stream is composed of discrete units called words, and the awareness that the relationship between words and their meaning is arbitrary.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62)
- b) *Phonological awareness* “is the ability to recognize that speech is composed of distinct units of sound. In phonological awareness tasks, children are required to isolate relevant phonological segments as the basis of their analysis.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62)

- c) *Sentence awareness* “is the ability to recognize utterances which are grammatically acceptable within the language. In sentence awareness tasks, the children are often asked to detect, correct and explain errors.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62)
- d) *Semantic awareness* is “the children’s ability to form a semantic hierarchy and organize objects into superordinate or subordinate categories.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 62)

Indeed, there is no need to specify that bilingual / plurilingual individuals are highly advantaged compared to monolingual ones with respect to such “*awareness abilities*”, since these ones are inherent to the overall bilingual / plurilingual metalinguistic awareness trait / ability (which we have already widely explained and sustained in the course of the present sub-chapter).

In conclusion, we might also want to consider this concept in relation to *bilingual / plurilingual education*, which is found not only inside one’s own family, but also inside the school system.

Many professionals, researchers in the field and politicians themselves have contributed on delineating positive and future-oriented views / paths towards a more bilingual / plurilingual integration in school and society.

One of them is Cristofari (2004), who claims that “showing children the diversity of languages and cultures make it possible to give children the desire, a taste for learning other languages but also guarantees that they will acquire metalinguistic competencies” (Cristofari, 2004: 2), but also Duverger (1996), who “asserts that minority language bilingual education both has positive repercussions for the child’s acquisition of literacy in the dominant language and simply creates better learners.” (Heller, 2007: 65-66)

Nonetheless, from “the 1996 document he provided for the 2004 conference on bilingualism” (Heller, 2007: 65-66), Duverger affirms that:

“Learning to read and write in the first language (mother tongue) is reinforced (by bilingual education). There is thus a benefit for the two languages (...) The child, put into contact early on with two languages, compares them and becomes aware of how they function and develops a metalinguistic consciousness. Moreover, at the point when they enter middle school, these children’s school performance / results are significantly superior to monolingual children.” (Duverger, 1996: 2)

In conclusion, all these documents / studies “emphasize bilingual children’s superior qualities of abstraction, identify the movement between languages as a catalyst for the acquisition of generalized competencies and value literacy skills in particular.” (Heller, 2007: 65-66) In addition, they “affirm that these metalinguistic benefits are not limited to children with balanced bilingual competence: they are an outcome of every stage in the process of learning the minority language. (...) In effect, despite the differences between levels of practice in the two languages, the patterns of learning and of structuration of them resemble each other at times, are intertwined and can form a single whole. What children learn, especially on the metalinguistic level, is transferable from one language to another. (BO 33 2001: 11) (...) This represents the bilingual person as an amalgam of mutually-reinforcing competencies, rather than as a place where languages as whole codes exist in balance.” (Heller, 2007: 65-66)

5.2.2. The Threshold Hypothesis (Cummins; 1976) and the Analysis and Control Hypothesis (Bialystok; 2001)

Despite the fact that bilingual / plurilingual individuals are generally seen as being superior / advantaged over monolingual ones, with respect to their degree of metalinguistic awareness, we must clarify one important aspect of such belief / phenomenon: not *all* bilinguals / plurilinguals outperform their relative monolingual peers on *all* metalinguistic tasks.

This is not only a question of balance between language proficiency and cognitive / academic outcomes, (we know that, indeed, “the term “bilingual” includes those who are highly proficient in both languages (across a variety of dimensions) to those whose dual language abilities are underdeveloped in both their languages. In between are many variations and possibilities” (Baker, Jones, 1998: 74)), but also, in order to explain such instance, we need to take into consideration two “stands of argument: the first is the *Threshold hypothesis* proposed by Cummins (1976) and the second is *the Analysis and Control hypothesis* proposed by Bialystok (2001).” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 67)

According to the first one, the so-called *Threshold hypothesis*, which “has found support from studies by Bialystok (1988), Dawe (1983), Galambos and Hakuta (1988), Ricciardelli (1992) and Clarkson and Galbraith (1992), who found that the performance of bilinguals improved with increased language proficiency” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 67), it is possible to “partially summarize the relationship between cognition and degree of bilingualism.” (Baker, 2006: 171)

In particular, it is with the medium / help of such theory that we can respond to inquiries such as:

- a) *“Under what conditions does bilingualism have positive, neutral and negative effects on cognition?”*
- b) *“How far does someone have to travel up the two language ladders to obtain cognitive advantages from bilingualism?”* (Baker, 2006: 171)

The Threshold hypothesis, indeed, which “was first postulated by Toukoma and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) and by Cummins (1976)” (Baker, 2006: 171), claims that “the research on cognition and bilingualism is best explained by the idea of two thresholds. Each threshold is a level of language competence that has consequences for a child. The first threshold is a level for a child to reach to avoid the negative consequences of bilingualism. The second threshold is a level required to experience the possible positive benefits of bilingualism.” (Baker, 2006: 171) Hence, “once past this second threshold, a bilingual child may have thinking advantages over monolinguals.” (Baker, Jones, 1998: 74)

As a consequence, it appears evident that “such a theory therefore limits which children will be likely to obtain cognitive benefits from bilingualism. It also suggests that there are children who may derive detrimental consequences from their bilingualism.” (Baker, 2006: 171)

On the other hand, as far as the *Analysis and Control hypothesis* is concerned with, Bialystok (2001) “identified two cognitive processes, *control of attention* and *analysis of representational structure*, which she argues are able to explain the different demands in the tasks.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 68-69)

In particular, “the central thesis in Bialystok’s (2001) proposal is that the enhanced metalinguistic awareness effect operates differently for different linguistic structures. She argues that bilingualism does not have a general effect on a domain of knowledge such as metalinguistic awareness. Rather, the effect is on the underlying cognitive processes that are activated in the different tasks.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 68-69)

In conclusion, with respect to such theory, it was recently discovered that “the bilingual advantage in control of linguistic processing tasks disappears in young adulthood only to reappear again at a later stage. (...) This framework presents a useful way of resolving the discrepancies in research findings.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 68-69)

5.3. Communication Advantages of Bilingualism

At this point we shift the focus of attention from the many and fundamental cognitive advantages of bilingualism / plurilingualism to the ones related to *communication*.

First of all, when considering the entity of *communication*, thus its inner nature, we need to define it as “a *reciprocal verbal or non-verbal exchange* between two or more people”; in other words, it is “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour.”⁹⁸ (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2019)

A bilingual / plurilingual individual, in this sense, is seen as someone who is hugely advantaged (compared to its own monolingual peers) with respect to the vast range of people he / she can communicate with. This phenomenon, of course, is due to his / her double or multiple knowledge of languages, which enables him / her to “communicate with a wide variety of people.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 13)

As a matter of fact, as Baker and Sienkewicz affirm in “The Care and Education of Young Bilinguals: An Introduction for Professionals” (2000), “when travelling, bilingual children have the distinct advantage that their languages provide bridges to new relationships. While a monolingual can communicate with a variety of people in one language, monolingualism sometimes raises barriers to relationships within other nationalities and ethnic groups. Bilingualism enables the individual to move between cultures.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 13)

Moreover, bilingualism does not only allow people to communicate with others belonging to different linguistic / cultural / professional groups, or distant regions of the planet. It “also allows communication between generations.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 11-12)

This is another important aspect worth of mentioning, since many bilingual / plurilingual families, unfortunately, sometimes give up on transmitting their original mother tongue to their offspring, due to a variable of reasons (previously expressed).

In such way, the new generations who have been deprived from the parents’ linguistic heritage would not be able to communicate with their extended family, given that they

⁹⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>

do still exist or live somewhere else in the planet (possibly, in the parents' country of origins).

On the other hand, if bilingualism / plurilingualism is promoted inside (but also outside) the family, “when the extended family in another region speaks a different language from the child, (...) the bilingual child has the chance of bridging that gap, building relationships, and feeling a sense of belonging and roots within the extended family.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 11-12)

Finally, another aspect which points to the effective advantages of bilingualism / plurilingualism in communication, is the fact that, as Garcia claims in “Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective” (2009), “although all speakers have choices, bilinguals with two codes or more at their disposal constantly have to understand and decide on the linguistic choices they have in particular situations. This practice in gauging the communicative situation gives bilinguals what is known as more *communicative sensitivity*.” (Garcia, 2009)⁹⁹

This fact is demonstrated, for instance, in one of Ben-Zeev's (1977) experiments, where he “suggests that the Spanish-English bilinguals and Hebrew-English bilinguals in her study showed more sensitivity to the content of the verbal stimulus than monolinguals, perhaps because they constantly have to evaluate whether the language is correct or incorrect.” (Garcia, 2009)¹⁰⁰

In conclusion, we can list a number of “*advantages in communication*” which resume all we have claimed so far. These, as Rodriguez *et al.* (2014) affirm, correspond to:

- a) “Direct and continuous access to global and international information.
- b) Direct contact with people and organizations from different cultures and languages.
- c) Ability to understand what information is being disseminated in other languages.
- d) Ability to use information in different ways.
- e) Opportunity to translate / communicate information to colleagues.

⁹⁹https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

¹⁰⁰https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

- f) Transfer of knowledge, concepts, and vocabulary from one language to the other.
- g) Ability to find solutions to problems by analysing them through the two languages.”
(Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 8)

5.3.1. Biliteracy

This is another fundamental component of bilingual / plurilingual communicative advantages. Indeed, as Hornberger (2003) affirms, the concept of “*biliteracy*” refers to “any and all instances in which communication occurs in two or more languages. Different forms and levels of biliteracy develop in different social contexts, resulting in varying levels of reading and writing proficiency in two or more languages.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 11)

In other words, “when bilinguals are biliterate (literate in two languages), they have another communication advantage; they can access two literatures, open up to different traditions, ideas, ways of thinking and acting. Biliteracy doubles the pleasures of reading novels or magazines, of writing to friends, it enhances educational writing and reading, and satisfies doubly the literacy requirements of employment.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 13-14)

As a consequence, the bilingual individual who is also biliterate “has a two or more worlds of experience. Each language implies different systems of behaviour, folk sayings, stories, histories, traditions, greetings, rituals, even conversation. With two languages go a wider cultural experience, greater tolerance of cultural difference, less racism.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 13-14)

In addition, and most importantly, the degree of one’s own biliteracy is also seen to influence its own *school achievement*: as Rodriguez *et al.* (2014) report, for example, “a study conducted by Bialystok, Luk, and Kwan (2005) showed the impact of knowing one language and writing system on learning another. (...) Their interpretation of results is that bilingualism has two effects on early acquisition of literacy: (1) a general understanding of reading and its basis in a print system; and (2) the potential for transfer of reading principles across languages. All bilinguals showed an advantage in these areas over monolinguals, but the more similar the two languages were, the greater the advantage.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 11)

In other words, with this study (2005) they demonstrated “that bilinguals understand the symbolic representation of words in print earlier than monolinguals, as they see words printed in two separate ways. This implies that these abilities may facilitate the early acquisition of reading” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 11), and, consequently, they “showed that bilingual children

demonstrated some general advantage over monolinguals in their ability to decode written forms into meaningful units. Strategies that may be transferred include knowledge of text structure, visual-perceptual relationships, and readiness skills.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 12)

Last but not least, it was also discovered that “bilingual students who speak their native language fluently and have developed *age-appropriate literacy skills* have increased opportunities to learn *content knowledge*, which includes facts, concepts, processes, and principles (Goldenberg, 2006, 2008; Viadero, 2009).” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 12)

5.3.2. Ability to Learn Multiple Languages

In addition, having communicative advantages also means (as far as bilingual / plurilingual individuals are concerned with), *to be able to learn multiple languages*.

As a matter of fact, bilinguals / plurilinguals are said to be “*better learners of multiple languages*”, compared to their monolingual peers. The establishment of such belief could be due to a variety of reasons, such as their attested difference in *brain linguistic lateralisation*, their *habit* of knowing / thinking / speaking in more than one language already, their *attitudes* toward languages and the *process of learning* itself.

Overall, as Chin and Wigglesworth claim in “Bilingualism, an advanced resourced book” (2007), we can firmly state that “apart from cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness, bilingualism has also been found to enhance other types of skills.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 69-70)

One of these skills, hence, is the ability of learning a third, fourth or more languages. As an example, “researchers such as Bild and Swain (1989) have reported that Grade 8 students from heritage (non-English immigrants) language backgrounds who were enrolled in a French-English bilingual programme performed better than an English-background group in the same programme.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 69-70)

Others, such as “Clyne et al. (2004) have similarly reported bilinguals to be more effective and persistent learners of a target language than monolingual learners. Apart from the general language learning abilities, bilingual children were also found to acquire pragmatic skills more efficiently in a third language.” (Chin, Wigglesworth, 2007: 69-70)

In conclusion, therefore, we can assume that “the ability to speak many languages is a type of intelligence” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 8), as Gardner would claim. Indeed, since human beings’ different *types of intelligence* are located and developed in different *areas of the brain*, and since the *linguistic ability* is a *type of intelligence* itself, we can affirm that the “linguistic ability is located in an area of the brain that can be *increased in size and connections* with *rehearsal*. Inversely, if this area of the brain is removed, the individual loses this type of intelligence. Under this definition, *foreign language ability*, as a subheading under linguistic intelligence, is indeed a *type of intelligence*.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 8)

However, some “pessimistic” viewers of such phenomenon claim that “if the languages being learned have completely different linguistic roots, no benefits will be found” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 11), even with respect to bilinguals’ / plurilinguals’ multiple language acquisition.

This assumption, fortunately, has already been “disproved by McLaughlin and Nation (1986) who conducted a study showing how monolinguals, bilinguals and multilinguals differed in their approach to an unknown language. They found that bilinguals were better than monolinguals, and multilinguals better than bilinguals in identifying grammatical structures in languages. They made assumptions about strings of an unknown written language that later proved to be correct” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 11), thus demonstrating that bilinguals / plurilinguals, overall, are (better) able to learn multiple varieties of any kind of language (these being even very different from one another with respect to linguistic structures).

This hypothesis could also be sustained by human beings’ universal abilities of learning: let us take the *child’s mind* as an example. As Tokuhama-Espinosa (2003) claims, as a matter of fact, “*if I can roller skate, and I can ski, then why shouldn’t I be able to roller-blade or use a scooter, which is very similar?* While it may be an entirely different sport (or an entirely different language), *if I could learn the first two, why shouldn’t I be able to learn a third (or a fourth or a fifth)?* The use of prior knowledge to learn new, related information is evident in foreign language development.” (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003: 11)

5.4. Social Advantages of Bilingualism

Other advantages worth mentioning in relation to bilingualism / plurilingualism are, indeed, the so-called *social advantages*.

These ones do not only involve our social relationships in and outside our family or inner circles (therefore, including peers, friends, colleagues, or random strangers whom we have to communicate with for daily basic purposes), but also other areas of life, such as: economics (with respect to socio-economic careers / aspirations), local and global interactions, “potentialising acts of identities”, (as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) would refer to them), etc.

In general, we can claim that since “current economic, political and social trends are moving toward an even more connected world, which are influencing the use of language and communication” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 7-8), it becomes inevitable that bilingualism / plurilingualism is “encouraged for economic, informational, employment, and social interaction purposes, as well as for increasing cross-cultural understanding.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 7-8)

Consequently, it is no news to us, as Rodriguez *et al.* (2014) also affirm, that “bilingualism provides benefits to the individual and to the society; it promotes international unity and closeness, and it provides opportunities for members of a nation to demonstrate consideration and respect to members of minority language groups. The opposite will cause dissension.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 7-8)

For such reasons bilingualism / plurilingualism should always be encouraged at all levels of society. To such purpose, let us have a look at the specific environments in which this phenomenon could (and definitely does) represent a huge advantage / richness, not only for the bilingual / plurilingual individual itself, but also for the society in general.

5.4.1. Socioeconomic Environment

According to this dimension, we have to realise that “due to *common markets*, *international trade*, *military security*, and *ongoing travel*, the ability to speak two or more languages is seen as facilitating the realization of all these activities. The importance of knowledge of languages in addition to English in *media*, *communications*, *economics*, and *trade* is well established and will be even more important in the future for individuals as well as for

governments, companies, and other institutions and organizations.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 7-8)

Indeed, innumerable advantages with respect to such socioeconomic environment are perceived by individuals whose bilinguality / plurilinguality benefit the societies / firms / global economy/trades they are working with.

Such “*perceived benefits*”, in relation to the dimensions of “*career and employment*” on one hand, and “*economy / trade*” on the other, correspond to the following ones.

As far as the *career and employment* dimension is concerned with, these are:

- a) “*Being valued on the job for the ability to communicate with a diverse range of customers.*”
- b) *Opportunity to move up within the same company or outside the company.*
- c) *Opportunity to work in a bilingual work environment, enabling people to work in a comfortable place.*
- d) *More opportunities for retaining a job.*
- e) *Opportunities for travel.*” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 8)

As far as the *economy / trade* dimension is concerned with, on the other hand, they are:

- a) “*Opportunity to conduct business in the language of the customer.*”
- b) *Using the language of the customer is good business.*
- c) *Business must have a larger bilingual workforce to meet to the needs of a global market.*
- d) *Having bilingual individuals is an advantage.*
- e) *Provision of a smooth and friendly interaction with other businesspeople.*” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 8)

5.4.2. Global (not only Local) Interactions

As a consequence of the overall socioeconomic benefits conferred by an ideal bilingual / plurilingual society, the global interactions themselves will be affected and increased (in terms of amount / sense of *advantage*) with respect to such phenomenon.

Indeed, it is evident that “potential economic advantages in bilingualism are increasing. A bilingual may have a wider choice of jobs in the future. As economic trade barriers fall, international relationships become closer, as international trade unions and partnerships grow more widespread, ever more jobs will require bilingual or multilingual workers. These workers are in increasing demand in the international retail sector, tourism, international transport, public relations, banking and accountancy, information technology, secretarial work, marketing and sales, the law, teaching and overseas aid work.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 14)

As a consequence, “careers in multinational companies, sales and export jobs, and an increasingly global economy make the future of employment more flexible for bilinguals than monolinguals.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 15)

Nonetheless, since “language is sometimes seen as a barrier to communication and friendship across social groups and countries, bilinguals in the home, community and society, on the other hand, can lower such barriers. They can be bridges within the family, community, and across societies. Those who speak two different languages personify this bridging of gaps between peoples of different colour, creed, culture, and language.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 15)

5.4.3. Potentialising Acts of Identities

In conclusion, one last social advantage for a bilingual / plurilingual individual is that of having the possibility “*to choose his / her identity*”. With this expression, we refer to the fact that, since children “are immersed in practices of very different worlds – those of the family and those of the school – and through these, they construct identities in relation to those communities” (Garcia, 2009)¹⁰¹, “a multiple identity developed through participation in different communicative networks gives children the possibility of developing more broadly, of drawing from many multiple perspectives.” (Garcia, 2009)¹⁰²

¹⁰¹https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBDoAQhcMAc

¹⁰²https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBDoAQhcMAc

This view, hence, resembles what Hall (1996: 4) refers to according to the concept of “*identity*”, this corresponding not only to “*who we are*” or “*where we came from*”, but also to “*what we might become*”.

In other words, we can claim that “a bilingual identity constitutes just one dimension of the many that make up a child’s identity – their gender, social class, ethnicity, race, nationality, community. But without the added dimension of bilingualism, some of these identities will never be constructed, developed, or represented.” (Garcia, 2009)¹⁰³

With respect to this, in conclusion, “Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) refer to the potential of language to index identity, to function as “*acts of identity*”. Certainly, bilingualism gives children a greater range of expression and thus more freedom in constituting or *performing*, as Pennycook (1998, 2002) might say, their own acts of identity.” (Garcia, 2009)¹⁰⁴

5.5. Cultural / Intercultural Advantages of Bilingualism

At this point we need to conclude the list of the many bilingual / plurilingual advantages, thus briefly explaining which *cultural / intercultural advantages* such individuals might perceive in their daily lives.

Starting from the presupposition that “the monolingual also experiences a variety of cultures, from neighbours and communities which use the same language but have different ways of life” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 14) and that he / she can also obviously “travel to other countries and other cultures” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 14), we still need to remind the fundamental fact that “penetrating a different society requires the *language of that culture*.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 14)

Indeed, “participation and involvement in the cultural core requires knowing its language, as a consequence, the bilingual has an improved chance of actively penetrating both language cultures.” (Baker, Sienkewicz, 2000: 14)

¹⁰³https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBDoAQhcMAc

¹⁰⁴https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBDoAQhcMAc

Therefore, such ability, which implies the so-called *intercultural awareness*, is a particular trait which is often (if not always) found in bilingual / plurilingual individuals. Nonetheless, as Garcia affirms in “Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective” (2009), “being or becoming bilingual, if successfully achieved, enhances cultural awareness, both in the culture(s) of origin and the culture of the additional language. When one is confronted with another way of looking at things, as if through a different pair of spectacles, one becomes more aware of one’s culture of origin, as well as that of others.” (Garcia, 2009)¹⁰⁵

This *intercultural awareness* phenomenon is found in a variety of situations, in which a “communication / cross-cultural understanding” is needed. One of these instances could be found in the workplaces which, according to Rodriguez *et al.* (2014), imply the presence of specific *figures / abilities*, such as:

- a) “Intercultural mediator in a variety of marketing situations.
- b) Ability to relate to co-workers from other regions by speaking their language and knowing something of their culture.
- c) Ability to bridge the cultural gap through knowledge of the language and culture of other business groups.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 8)

Moreover, it is worth reminding that “bilingualism also positively influences the *affective domain*. Encouragement in using two or more languages, especially if one is the home language, has an effect, not only on how individuals think, but also on how they *feel*, as it demonstrates *appreciation and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity*.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 13)

As a demonstration of such claim, “Wnag, Shao & Li (2010) interviewed bilingual children in both of their languages, and they found that these children had different stories, memories, and personal reports based on which language was used in the prompt. This finding indicates that a person’s cultural belief system and autobiographical accounts are influenced and accessed differently through different languages, and they actually correspond to a language.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 13)

In conclusion, we can establish that “bilingual and multilingual individuals tend to be better able to understand and communicate with members of other cultural groups and are able to expand their own world by becoming knowledgeable of multiple cultures.” (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 13)

¹⁰⁵https://books.google.it/books?id=bW6V__K95ckC&pg=PT23&dq=cognitive+advantages+of+bilingualism&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjm9oXxx8_jAhUIuaQKHUvYD7A4FBD0AQhcMAc

Last but not least, if we would also want to take the *school policy / politics* into account, we should cite Baker's (2006) theory, which "stated that by providing students opportunities to learn through more than one language in school, it may help to reduce conflict and increase harmony among language groups. He theorized that in Canada, French-speaking children learning English, and English-speaking children learning French may help their parents and politicians to produce a more bilingual as well as a more integrated Canadian society." (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2014: 13)

6. Case Study, Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. The Instrument of Data Analysis

The crowning of this thesis on “*Plurilingual Acquisition of Language: Early vs Late Bilingualism Comparison. The Bilingual Advantages from a Cognitive and Intercultural / Relational point of view at a Social, Academic and Working Level*” could not be other than a pragmatic case study, pointing (implicitly) to the effective cognitive and intercultural / relational differences at a social, academic and working level among monolingual and bilingual / plurilingual individuals and, explicitly and more specifically, between *early* bilingual individuals and *late* bilingual individuals.

The instrument used in order to conduct such investigation has been that of an *online questionnaire*: this choice of format, according to Serragiotto in “Cosa ti hanno insegnato al Liceo? La percezione di studenti di Lingue sulla loro formazione linguistica” (2012) as well, is considered to be the most suitable one according to many advantageous factors, such as:

- a) *Students’ accessibility*: indeed, the questionnaire was sent to their email addresses, where they would simply download it / open the link and complete it online (even on their cell phones, thus this process being very easy and practical);
- b) *Visual impact*: in contrast to the *traditional paper questionnaire* (which appears to be relatively longer, due to the spaces left for completing it by the students), this format is more *compact* and it “shapes up” along with the process of the respondents’ questionnaire fulfilment, thus eliminating in this way any incidence of *demotivation* caused by such requirements.
- c) *Responses*: they are automatically sent to the “*questionnaire (Google Module) administrator’s*” account at the end of the questionnaire fulfilment. This process, thus, is direct, easy and fast, compared to what would imply a traditional paper questionnaire.
- d) *Practicality and easiness in data analysis and discussion*.

6.2. Questionnaire: “Plurilingual Acquisition of Language: Early vs Late Bilingualism Comparison. The Bilingual Advantages from a Cognitive and Intercultural / Relational point of view at a Social, Academic and Working Level”

At this point, we will report and discuss the various sections and, more specifically, the 35 items of the questionnaire which has been submitted to 34 *bilingual / plurilingual candidates* who, in addition, distinguish themselves from being *early bilinguals / plurilinguals*, on one hand, and *late bilinguals / plurilinguals*, on the other hand.

The 35 questions which they have been asked to respond to have all been constructed on the basis of the research / claims made on this thesis. Therefore, the readers will notice, reading on, that most of the topics which we have been discussing in the course of the last chapters (such as *the process of language acquisition, code-mixing and code-switching phenomena, typologies of bilingualism, metalinguistic / extra-linguistic awareness*, just to cite some of them), will be re-found here, under other “*vests*”.

6.2.1. Definition of the Linguistic Context

First of all, an initial, introductory Table is asked to be filled by each candidate in order for us to contextualise his / her own personal linguistic history / background, thus enabling us to further draw the suitable conclusions in relation to it (his / her own responses) and to the other candidates’ responses. As previously mentioned, 35 specific and equal-to-all candidates questions will follow.

Worth mentioning, the *candidates’ anonymity* is preserved, hence the labels *name* and *surname* are not included in the Table’s requirements.

Table:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Age | |
| Sex | |
| Mother Tongue | |
| Second (or more) language(s) | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Father's mother tongue | |
| Mother's mother tongue | |
| Nationality | |
| Country of residence (of today) | |

The “*father's mother tongue / mother's mother tongue*” label, indeed, is a fundamental requirement to be filled in, since it gives us the familiar “inner” environment in which the bilingual / plurilingual individual has born / been growing into, this (therefore) partly (if not completely) influencing his / her own bi-/ pluri-/linguistic development.

6.2.2. Plurilingual Acquisition of Language: Background and Process

This first section of the Questionnaire partly resumes what has already been required in the previous introductory Table, namely the interviewed people's *L1 / L2 acquisition context (background and process of language(s) acquisition)*.

Moreover, it investigates on their own *self-consideration / awareness* of their own processes of language(s) learning, being many instances / factors related to it taken into account, such as: the *environment* where the L2(s) have been learnt, the *reasons* behind their language(s) learning, the *difficulties* they might have encountered in doing so and which they might still have / feel when speaking, the *critical periods hypothesis*, the *code-mixing / code-switching* phenomena, the *unconscious / conscious influence of the mind*.

Therefore, here are the related questions:

1. Where are you born?

(Write your answer)

This 1st question is to frame the respondent's *nationality*: its only purpose, therefore, is to contextualise the individual's belonging to a linguistic / cultural group, in terms of *acquisition of L1 or simultaneous / successive acquisition of L2*.

2. Is your first language (L1)¹⁰⁶ spoken in your country of residence?

Yes

No

This 2nd question implicitly puts in evidence / differentiates those who have been learning their L2 (or more languages) since birth (therefore, developing an *early kind of bilingualism*), from those who have started learning it / them from a later stage in life (hence, developing the so-called *late bilingualism* type).

Knowing such incidence is fundamental to the purpose of our research, since it gives us one of the main information we require: *the presence of one's own mother tongue (L1) in their today country of residence* (which obviously, as a consequence, influences one's own *linguistic competency and life style / quality* in his / her specific Country).

3. If the answer in the previous question is “No”, say at what age you learnt the language of your country of residence (L2)¹⁰⁷.

(Write your answer)

This 3rd question, seen as a “clarification” of the previous one, requires participants to state at what age they learnt their L2 (or more languages). In this sense, a *successive / late kind of bilingualism* is already prefigured / established.

This data will be of extreme relevance / importance to our subsequent analysis of the following questions, and for the overall *data analysis*, since, (as previously expressed at the beginning of the chapter), one of our main purposes is to also establish and analyse the differences which may exist between *early bilingual / plurilingual individuals' and late bilingual / plurilingual individuals' linguistic competencies*.

4. How did you learn your L2 (*minority language)¹⁰⁸?**

¹⁰⁶ “A first language is a native language.”

¹⁰⁷ “A language that a person can speak that is not the first language they learned naturally as a child.” (Cambridge Dictionary; 2019)

- a. From my parents simply speaking to me
- b. From my mother
- c. At school
- d. From my father
- e. I had a one-year Exchange-student experience abroad / I moved abroad

This 4th question focuses on the *process of language acquisition* and, in particular, on the *modality* through which this process has taken place. Indeed, the 5 options proposed above reflect some very specific and influential realities in one's own linguistic acquisition and development.

Hence, the responses will mark the candidates' possible differentiation between one another with respect to their *degree of bilinguality*, since such instances (the process of language(s) learning taking place *inside one's own home environment* in contrast to *one's own outside home environment*, for instance), definitely determine, (as we have seen in the course of the thesis' discussion), *one's own linguistic capacities / preferences / conferred linguistic values*, etc.).

5. Why did you learn your L2?

- a. It was my parents' mother tongue (they had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence)
- b. I had to: I moved to a foreign country for studying / working purposes
- c. It was my mother's mother tongue (she had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence)
- d. It was my father's mother tongue (he had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence)
- e. It was my choice to learn another language, for pleasure

This 5th question, along with the previous one, focuses on the respondents' *linguistic acquisition process*, but, this time, precisely on the *reasons / circumstances* behind it. Indeed, learning an L2 (or more languages) because *one has to / is obliged to*, is very different from circumstances in which *one chooses to*, for instance.

¹⁰⁸ "A minority language is a language spoken by a minority of the population of a territory. Such people are termed linguistic minorities or language minorities." (Wikipedia, 26 June 2019, at 13:45 (UTC))

As a consequence, this is another extremely important question for the overall theoretical purpose of this questionnaire, since it states one of the fundamental basis of one's own language(s) acquisition: the concepts of *duty (obligation)*, *need*, *will*, *pleasure* and, (inevitably, though implicitly), *motivation*.

6. Was it hard for you to learn your L2?

- a. I do not remember, I was only a kid
- b. Extremely hard, at the beginning I could not understand anybody
- c. A little, because my parents did not know it and they would only talk to me in the other language (their mother tongue)
- d. A little, but my friends would help me do it, thus speaking slower than usual and giving me linguistic examples and explanations any time I needed it
- e. Yes, pretty difficult, I had to study and practice it for a long time

This 6th question implicitly points to the concept of *critical period*: this is crucial for the purpose of noticing the different impacts of the *age factor in language(s) learning*. As a matter of fact, those individuals who affirmed to be *early bilinguals* gave (as we will see later on) different answers to this question with respect to those who defined themselves as *late bilinguals*.

Worth mentioning, (even if it should already be crystal clear, after the reading of this thesis), is the fact that the concept of *critical period in language acquisition* is firmly interrelated with that of *difficulty / easiness in learning (a) language(s)*. (All these aspects have already been deeply discussed in the course of the previous chapters, thus they will not be repeated here).

7. On a scale from 1 to 10, how hard was it to learn it?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

This 7th question is a “clarification”, (which goes more in “*numerical-detail*”), of the previous question. From our point of view, indeed, it is very useful for people to *self-inquire* themselves on the *level / value* they themselves give to their own language(s) acquisition process, being various aspects taken into account (in this case, specifically, the concept of *difficulty in learning (a) language(s)*).

8. Does it take much effort to you to speak in your own L2?

- a. Not at all, it comes out naturally
- b. Sometimes it does, especially when I am tired
- c. Yes it does, especially with strangers / people I do not know very well
- d. All the time, I feel like I will never learn it properly

This 8th question might seem equal to the previous one, but there is a slightly inner differentiation, being that this last one is directed to one's own *capacity / proficiency* (according to his / her own *effort he / she puts in doing so*) in the *present moment of speaking*, therefore not in the past (in the starting / developing moment of language(s) acquisition).

9. On a scale from 1 to 10, how hard is it to speak it?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

This 9th question, along with the 7th one, is to make people *acknowledge / become aware* of their own linguistic capacities, thus reflecting (in this specific case) on their own present *difficulty* in speaking.

Such *metalinguistic work / effort* (which is required to our interviewed people), is thus emphasised, and we will notice it again in the following questions.

(There is also a reason behind it, namely that this topic (*bilinguals / plurilinguals metalinguistic awareness capacities / advantages*) has been widely discussed in Chapter 5 “*Advantages of Bilingualism*”, and it constitutes one of the main and *to be-established* claims of this thesis).

10. Sometimes, it happens that I *mix* my two (or more) languages while I'm speaking:

TRUE

FALSE

This 10th question points to the concept of *code-mixing / code-switching*, which has been a fairly important topic of discussion in the thesis.

Specifically, the phenomenon of *code-mixing / code-switching* points to the many *false myths* which have been circulated for many years regarding the *disadvantages*

associated to bilingualism / plurilingualism. On the other hand, as we have demonstrated in *Chapter 4 “False Myths on Bilingualism”*, these mechanisms are no proof / evidence of bilinguals / plurilinguals linguistic delays or disadvantages, but they just represent an innocuous and inevitable stage they may pass through during / along their bi-/pluri-/linguistic acquisition process / development.

The purpose of such question, therefore, is to investigate whether the bilingual / plurilingual individual currently finds himself in such position or not, therefore it also inevitably differentiates those who have learnt their language(s) as a kid (and, as consequence, they are more likely to “fall” into such mechanical instances) from those who have learnt it / them later on (therefore, they are less likely to be affected by such phenomenon).

11. Do you ever dream in your other (minority) language?

Yes

No

This 11th question investigates on the respondents’ *unconscious material*, namely their *dreams*. Being this not the main concern of this thesis, no further explanations will be given here. It is just a reminder of the fact that our *mind* (and its *conscious / unconscious elaborations*) always plays an important role in our psyche and daily-basis life.

12. In case you replied “Yes” in the previous question, does this surprise you?

Yes, because I usually dream in my L1

No, it happens to me quite often

This 12th question is another interesting *point of consideration* with respect to the previous one.

6.2.3. Types of Bilingualism / Plurilingualism and Metalinguistic Awareness

This second section of the Questionnaire investigates, (as the Title specifies), on the different typologies of bilingualism / plurilingualism one might experience (according

to the specific sub-divisions we have seen and differentiated in *Chapter 3 “Types of Bilingualism”*). Moreover, its last couple of questions focus on students’ opinions regarding the so-called *recessive bilingualism type*, which takes place when one forgets (temporarily or permanently) one of the languages of his / her linguistic repertoire.

In particular, *questions 13 -> 19* focus on the concept of *dominance – balance* one might have with respect to both / his / her language(s) knowledge, therefore it implicitly states a division between *early balanced bilinguals* and *late dominant bilinguals*.

Worth mentioning, all these questions have been asked to be discussed about, according to the interviewed people’s *self-consideration / critical analysis*’ point of view. Therefore, a *metalinguistic* kind of work / analysis has been emphasised in the process of answering them.

Let us have a look at the specific questions:

13. Is it hard for you to talk about specialised fields (scientific subjects, for instance, such as informatics, economics, philosophy, etc.) in your own L2?

- a. No
- b. Yes
- c. Slightly, depending on how confident I feel on the subject

This 13th question is important with reference to the concept of *degree of bilingualism / plurilingualism*. As a matter of fact, we know (from the theory explained in *Chapter 3 “Types of Bilingualism”*) that factors such as *age, dominance / balance, addition / subtraction* and others influence one’s own ability / proficiency in both / all of his / her languages.

As a consequence, this specific question (pointing to the dimension of *specialised linguistic fields*) states a division among, for instance, early bilinguals who will most likely be able to master specialised conversations in both / all of their languages, and late bilinguals who probably won’t master both / all of their specialised language conversations.

This is just an assumption, but we have fairly strong evidence (given by theoretical works which we have also reported in this thesis) that this is actually what happens in reality.

14. When speaking your minority language, do you think first in your *dominant language¹⁰⁹ and then translate it into your minority language?**

- a. No
- b. Yes
- c. When I do it, I do not realise it

This 14th question also points to the dimension of *dominance / balance* with respect to one's own bilingual / plurilingual condition, along with all the other inner differentiations which have been listed and explained in the course of the Third Chapter, such as: *simultaneous and successive, compound-coordinate-subordinate, additive and subtracting bilingualism / plurilingualism* types.

Specifically, this question investigates the individuals' tendency to *depend* or *not depend* on their L1, when in need to communicate using the other language(s). Indeed, an individual who is subject to a simultaneous, balanced, coordinate and additive kind of bilingualism would not be affected by such "*dependency*", while, on the other hand, a successive, dominant, compound and subtracting bilingual would most likely depend on it.

15. In case you answered "Yes" in the previous question, can you explain us why?

(Write your answer)

This 15th question investigates, in relation to the previous one (and, according to positive answers), the respondents' attitudes and opinions regarding this phenomenon. Therefore, in a sort of way, it stimulates their own *critical thinking / metalinguistic awareness*.

16. On a scale from 1 to 10, how competent do you feel yourself in using both languages?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

¹⁰⁹ "The dominant language is the language with which a bilingual or multilingual speaker has greatest proficiency and/or uses more often." (Colorin Colorado; s.d.)

This 16th question strictly focuses on one's own degree of *competence* with respect to both his / her languages. Once again, the focus is on the individual's degree of bilingualism, in terms of factors such as balance and dominance (and other) types / classifications of bilingualism / plurilingualism.

17. Do you have one dominant language, meaning that you feel more comfortable using it, compared to the other one?

Yes

No

This 17th question, as the previous ones, points to the dimension of balance between the two or more languages one individual knows, plus taking the dimension of *comfortability (in using it / them)* into account.

18. In case you answered “Yes” in the previous question, can you explain us why?

(Write your answer)

This 18th question investigates on *dominant bilingual / plurilingual individuals'* opinion regarding their own condition of dominance with respect to their two or more languages they know.

19. Do you think it is possible to forget your minority language?

- a. No, it is impossible. I regularly speak it with my family / I learnt it when I was a child
- b. Yes, if I don't practice it
- c. Not completely, only the *naturalness* and *fluency* of it would initially being affected
- d. I cannot tell. I do not put much attention on *how* I speak, whenever I communicate using one or another language

This 19th question refers to the *recessive kind of bilingualism* typology. Specifically, by asking their opinion whether they could be forgetting their own minority language or

not, it consequently (indirectly) highlights the difference among bilinguals who have a *higher degree* of bilingualism (with respect to all the sub-typologies of bilingualism we have previously exposed) and those who have a *lower degree* of bilingualism, in terms of competency / proficiency / fluency / etc.

20. What happens to your language skills (of one of your languages) if you do not use that language for a period of time?

- a. They become worse: then it's my choice to keep practicing them or not
- b. I eventually lose them and forget them
- c. Nothing at all
- d. They become a bit "rusty", but only for a short period (even for a couple of hours / days) before I re-start speaking that language

This 20th question investigates on the possible "linguistic events" which might take place after / due to a period of "*language X non-use*".

Indeed, those who claim that "nothing happens" might be the ones who have learnt their languages as a child (therefore, who will likely never lose their linguistic abilities in that language, at least not completely), whereas those who claim that "they would forget them" can probably be classified as *late bilingual individuals* whose linguistic competency, unfortunately, will never be equal to the early bilinguals' one.

6.2.4. Advantages of Bilingualism and Self-Consideration on Bilingualism / Plurilingualism

This third and last section of the Questionnaire (which is also the longest one, due to its main importance with respect to the overall thesis' claim), investigates on the bilingual / plurilingual individuals' general advantages due to their bi-/pluri-lingual knowledge of languages.

Indeed, many of such advantages (which have also been described in *Chapter 5 "Advantages of Bilingualism"*), have been pointed out in the course of the following 15 questions, such as:

- e) *Cognitive advantages*, along with *metalinguistic awareness*;

- f) *Communication advantages*, along with *biliteracy* and *ability to learn multiple languages*;
- g) *Social advantages*, along with *socioeconomic advantages*, *global interactions*, *potentialising acts of identities*;
- h) *Cultural / Intercultural advantages*.

Worth mentioning is the fact that all these advantages have been asked to be discussed about, according to the interviewed people's *self-consideration / critical analysis* point of view. Therefore, a *metalinguistic* kind of work / analysis has been emphasised in the process of answering such questions.

Let us have a look at the specific questions:

21. Do you feel that, being a bilingual / plurilingual, you have a richer vocabulary at your disposal in order to express your ideas / opinions / feelings?

- a. No, because I don't usually mix the two languages when I speak
- b. Yes, and this might be a problem: sometimes I have to say something in one language, but I only know how to say it in the other language
- c. No, I mentally separate the two languages, therefore there are not "intrusions" between them

This 21st question points to the specific dimension of *cognitive advantages* of bilingualism / plurilingualism. Indeed, knowing more than one and only language allows people to dispose of a general much larger "vocabulary luggage", then it is their choice / attitudes / styles and types of intelligence which (as a consequence) make them use that resource as a bonus point in their life or not.

22. When you watch TV (movies / series / documentaries / etc.), in which language do you watch it?

- a. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence (even if it's not my major language / L1)
- b. In my L1 (the language I learnt first, as a kid)
- c. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence with my L1 subtitles
- d. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence with L2 subtitles

This 22nd question implicitly points to one's own *proficiency / ability* in his / her L2, thus, in other words, to his / her own *degree of bilingualism*.

As a matter of fact, a highly proficient bilingual / plurilingual individual would have no problems in watching TV in his / her L2 (or *minority language*), since his / her linguistic competencies would allow that, therefore these ones not imposing a limit in his / her everyday activities.

On the other hand, a lower proficient bilingual / plurilingual individual could experience some difficulties in such circumstance, given that his / her linguistic abilities / competencies are not developed enough.

23. Do you like reading in your own L2 (minority language)?

- a. Yes, it's a challenge for my linguistic abilities
- b. No, I find it too tiring, I prefer reading in my L1
- c. It does not make any difference to me than reading in my other(s) language(s)

This 23rd question can be explained in equal terms as the previous one (the only difference is in the transposition from one's *receptive ability*, that of *watching* TV, to another one, namely that of *reading* something). Therefore, no further explanation will be given here.

24. On a scale from “not at all hard” to “extremely hard / hardly impossible”, how hard do you think it would be for you to learn another language?

Not at all hard A little hard Hard Very hard Extremely hard / Hardly impossible

This 24th question investigates on one's own opinion regarding the difficulty in learning multiple languages.

As we have claimed in *Chapter 5 “Advantages of Bilingualism”*, bilinguals / plurilinguals are thought to be better learners (compared to monolinguals) of multiple languages, given many factors which induce such tendency / ability (and which have, indeed, already been discussed, thus they will not be reported here).

Moreover, in this specific case, further differentiations (with respect to the choice of answer) will be delineated among *early* and *late bilinguals*, due to their comfortability and attitudes towards speaking / learning other languages. This aspect will be developed in the *Data Analysis* sub-chapter.

25. On a scale from 1 to 10, how much your bilinguality / plurilinguality (in terms of linguistic knowledge) positively affected your education / school achievement / professional career?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

In this 25th question, participants are asked to give a value to their bi-/pluri-linguistic influence in general life (taking into consideration many environments, as expressed in the line above), therefore, on their *social advantages* from being bilinguals / plurilinguals.

Definitely, the typology of the written question (linear scale with numerical values) is a good methodological instrument in order to clearly and quickly discover their own opinions on it.

26. When you go travelling, do you feel more comfortable knowing that you are bilingual / plurilingual?

- a. Yes, because I can always explain myself using one or another language
- b. Not really, because everybody knows English anyway, therefore they can communicate in one way or another
- c. I don't know, it depends on other people's linguistic abilities (if they can understand me or not, for instance)

This 26th question also investigates, as the previous one, on the participants' opinion regarding their general *communicative advantages* when going abroad. It is always interesting to know what they think about it, thus stimulating their own inner critical thinking.

27. Would you move abroad if you didn't know the language of the country of destination?

- a. No / I don't think so: it would be too hard to learn another language

- b. I think so, but I have never considered that option yet
- c. Yes, I would definitely do it: I like linguistic / cultural challenges

This 27th question focuses on their own *attitudes / opinions* towards their possible *future plans / possibilities / choices*: indeed, a bilingual / plurilingual individual who is used to such changes (linguistic and cultural ones) should not have a problem in changing his “mentality”, thus way of life. There could also be some differences among early bilingual individuals and late bilingual individuals, which will be seen in the next sub-chapter.

28. Would you work in a multinational company which requires you to speak only your minority language (not the one spoken in your country of residence / your L1)?

- a. No, it would be too stressful
- b. No, I don’t think I would have the competencies
- c. Yes, it would not be a problem for me

This 28th question is similar to the previous one, the only difference being that, given a *future-job possibility choice*, one would choose between using only his / her minority language or not.

This decision could definitely be determined by one’s own linguistic knowledge / competency in that specific minority language, thus, implicitly, this question links (once again) to the same differentiation among the early bilingualism and late bilingualism’s dimensions we have been claiming so far.

29. On a scale from 1 to 10, (being yourself bilingual / plurilingual), how much do you consider yourself also *bicultural*¹¹⁰?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

This 29th question points to the dimension of *biculturalism*, which is something that is often considered in association with bilingualism.

However, not all bilingual / plurilingual individuals confirm on being bicultural / pluricultural as well, perhaps due to factors such as their condition being an *additive*

¹¹⁰ “of, relating to, or including two distinct cultures.” (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2019)

type of bilingualism or a *subtracting* one, the specific moment of their L2(s) acquisition which might have influenced their own attitudes towards that language / culture, therefore their *sense of belonging* to it, etc.

Consequently, we will see later on what our candidates have responded, and if there are any differentiations among them (once again, between early and late bilinguals).

30. Has it ever happened to you to “mediate” between people belonging to different linguistic / cultural groups?

Yes

No

This 30th question is something which one could ask to anybody, even to monolingual people. Although, in this specific case the implicit link is that a bilingual / plurilingual individual is often found in such circumstances since he / she might have to “arrange / manage” his daily life social-relationships among people with different mother tongues. Let us take an example: an immigrant Chinese man in Milan might be speaking English or Italian to his colleagues, but Chinese with his family. As a consequence, if the two “different linguistic groups” are found together, such situation of *mediation* would inevitably take place, therefore it becomes important for us to discover how the percentage of such instance impact on our respondents’ daily lives.

31. On a scale from “not at all” to “extremely”, how much does it embarrass you to speak in your own minority language among majority language speakers?

Not at all A little It does, normally / On average A lot Extremely

This 31st question, according to our point of view, could highlight a basic differentiation between early bilingual and late bilingual individuals.

Indeed, it is known that somebody who learns an L2 / FL at a later stage of life and does not acquire a native-like proficiency, often finds him/herself in *embarrassing situations* in which he / she cannot communicate properly, thus feel *inferior / out of place* in front of other native speakers of that language.

This is just a claim of ours, therefore we will see in the *Data Analysis* sub-chapter if that happens in reality.

32. Do you consider yourself advantaged, compared to your monolingual peers, for knowing more than one language?

Yes

No

This 32nd question basically resumes the general claim of this thesis: “*being bilingual / plurilingual represents an advantage compared to being monolingual, at many levels.*”

The modality in which it is asked, moreover, applies to the general methodology we have carried on until now, namely that of taking into consideration the candidates’ *introspection / critical analysis/thinking / self-consideration* point of view.

33. On a scale from 1 to 10, how important do you think it is to be bilingual / plurilingual today, with respect to social / academic / job opportunities?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

This 33rd question is another one in the line of the previous one, thus emphasising the role / value of the *importance* of being bilingual / plurilingual today.

The choice of format (linear scale of numerical values), also clarifies our question, giving us (as a consequence), a precise idea (expressed in numerical values) of our respondents’ opinions on it.

34. Would you raise your child bilingually, given the appropriate circumstances?

Yes

No

This 34th question can be considered as a “*crowning*” of all the work we have done so far.

Indeed, after having explained such beneficial and multiple effects of being bilingual / plurilingual, it is advisable (and hopeful / desired!), that those who have the fortune to grow up bilingual / plurilingual or to learn additional languages at a later stage of life, will continue doing so with their offspring.

35. In case you replied “Yes” in the previous question, say why.

(Write your answer)

This 35th question is just a “refinement” and further elucidation / clarification of the previous one (with respect, of course, to their responses).

6.3. Data Analysis

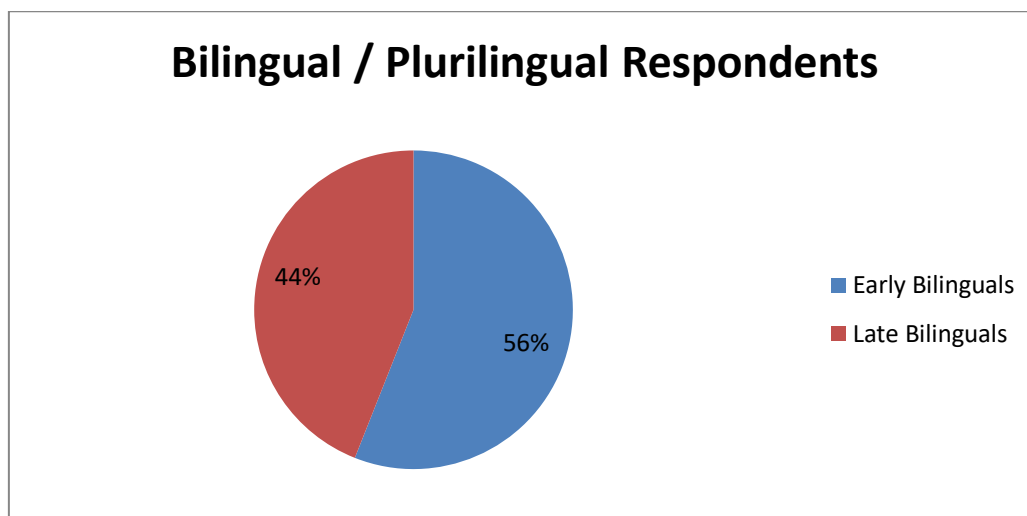
Now we will analyse all the data which have been collected from the above (described and explained) questionnaire. As claimed at the beginning of the chapter, the main objective of such questionnaire was to collect data / information from bilingual / plurilingual individuals on their own personal linguistic experience: namely, as we have seen in details, their specific *process of language(s) acquisition*, their own *metalinguistic awareness* and *social / relational feelings* with respect to such condition, their opinions on possible present and future *advantages* in relation to their state of bilinguality / plurilinguality, etc.

As we can see from the table below, 34 bilingual / plurilingual individuals have responded to such inquiry. Moreover, from what emerges from the analysis (which will be carried on shortly), these ones can already be divided into two main groups, according to one of the topics of our thesis: *early bilingualism* and *late bilingualism*. (This subdivision is important for the purpose of our research, since different responses, as we will see, have been given by individuals according to such fundamental differentiation).

| QUESTIONNAIRE | | |
|------------------|-----------------|-------|
| Early Bilinguals | Late Bilinguals | TOTAL |
| 19 | 15 | 34 |

This enquiry has been conducted in June - July - August 2019 in Vicenza (Italy) on the base of bilingual / plurilingual residents' presence in this city / country of Italy (and also

abroad). In the next paragraphs we will proceed on analysing systematically the single 35 items subdivided per sections / area.

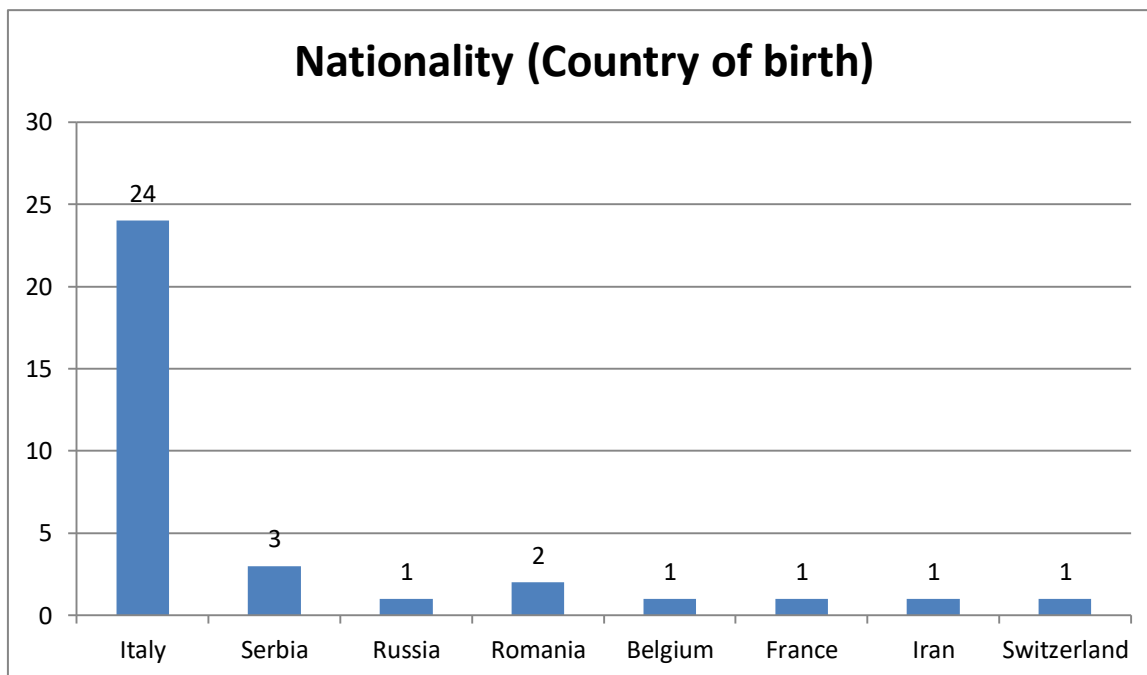


Moreover, within the following *graphs / charts*, we will see that the main (*early vs late bilingualism*) differentiation becomes even more evident and significant (to the purpose of our thesis' claim). Nearly all / the majority of the *early bilingual candidates* have given the same (or similar) responses to the same questions. The same can be affirmed with respect to the other group of candidates, that of the *late bilinguals*. This aspect will be further investigated.

Now, let us have a precise look at the results:

6.3.1. Plurilingual Acquisition of Language: Background and Process

1. Where are you born?



As we can notice from the Table above, out of the 34 respondents, the majority of them (24) comes from Italy (nonetheless, this is not surprising since our research has been conducted in Italy). A few others come from a variety of other Countries, such as Serbia (3), Russia (1), Romania (2), Belgium (1), France (1), Iran (1), Switzerland (1).

In particular, some respondents have also specified their city / town of birth, namely:

- a) Italy: Arzignano, Castelfranco Veneto, Bassano del Grappa, Bolzano, Roma, Padova, Venezia, Vicenza, Terni.
- b) Serbia: Belgrade, Majdanpek.
- c) Russia: Moscow.
- d) Switzerland (French Switzerland): Monthey.

In addition, as far as the previously mentioned differentiation (that of *early bilinguals* / *late bilinguals*) is taken into account, we can further split them into two main groups:

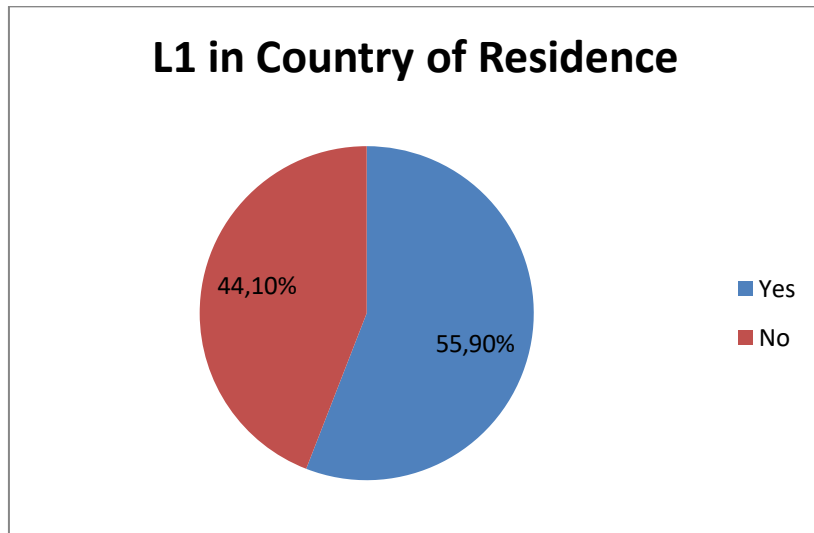
| | |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Early bilinguals:</i></p> <p>Italy (x 17): Terni, Vicenza, Roma, Venezia, Padova, Castelfranco Veneto, Bolzano.</p> <p>France</p> <p>Switzerland (French Switzerland): Monthey</p> | <p><i>Late bilinguals:</i></p> <p>Italy (x 7): Bassano del Grappa, Vicenza, Arzignano.</p> <p>Romania (x 2)</p> <p>Iran</p> <p>Belgium</p> <p>Serbia (x 3): Belgrade, Majdanpek.</p> |
|--|--|

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| | Russia: Moscow. |
|--|-----------------|

From what appears in this second Table, therefore, *immigration* seems to be the *cause / basement* of such “late bilingualism” development, since the respondents’ nationalities (in the 2nd group), in many cases (8) do not appear to be Italian, (the country where the investigation has been conducted). Only 7 out of 15 appear to have Italian nationality.

On the other hand, nearly all early bilinguals have Italian nationality (17).

2. Is your first language (L1)¹¹¹ spoken in your country of residence?



The majority of the respondents’ L1 (55,9%) seems to be spoken in their own country of residence. On the other hand, 44,1% of the candidates affirm that their L1 is not the official language of their country of residence.

Having a precise look at the inner responses’ differentiation between our already-delineated two groups, we can see / affirm that:

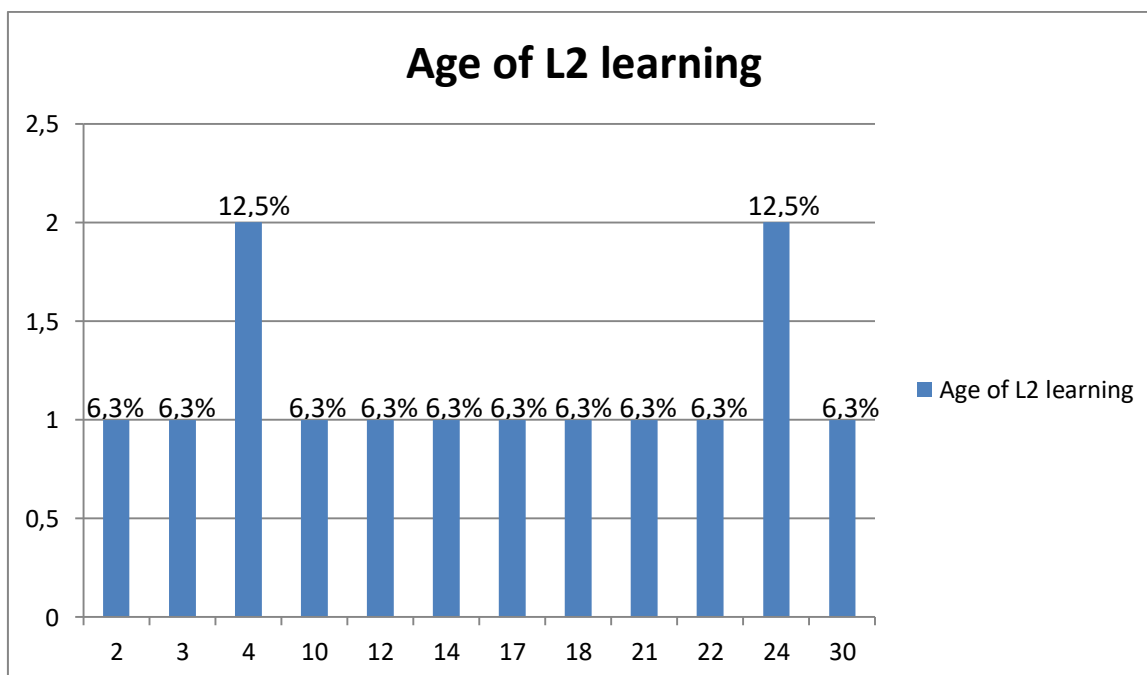
| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> Yes: 16 No: 3 | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> Yes: 0 No: 15 |
|--|---|

¹¹¹ “A first language is a native language.”

Nearly all early bilinguals' L1 is spoken in their country of residence, therefore it also represents the *official language of their country*: this factor is extremely relevant, since such *dominant linguistic position* in society would inevitably influence their degree of knowledge of that specific language along with the value / preference they would confer to it / the use of it. 3 of them, on the other hand, affirm not to speak their own L1 in their specific country of residence.

On the other side, all late bilinguals' L1 appears not to be spoken in their country of residence. Once again, as in the previous question, we might hypothesise that such condition / result might be caused by the *immigration* phenomenon, due to many reasons (which will be analysed in the next few questions).

3. If the answer in the previous question is “No”, say at what age you learnt the language of your country of residence (L2)¹¹².



Being this question juxtaposed to the previous one (hence, we already know that the only *late bilinguals* + 3 *early bilinguals* have responded *negatively* to it), we can skip the *general analysis / discussion* of the 1st graph (which usually resumes the *total data*

¹¹² “A language that a person can speak that is not the first language they learned naturally as a child.” (Cambridge Dictionary; 2019)

of both early bilingual and late bilingual respondents), and go directly to the 2nd table's analysis.

Therefore, as we could presume, we see that:

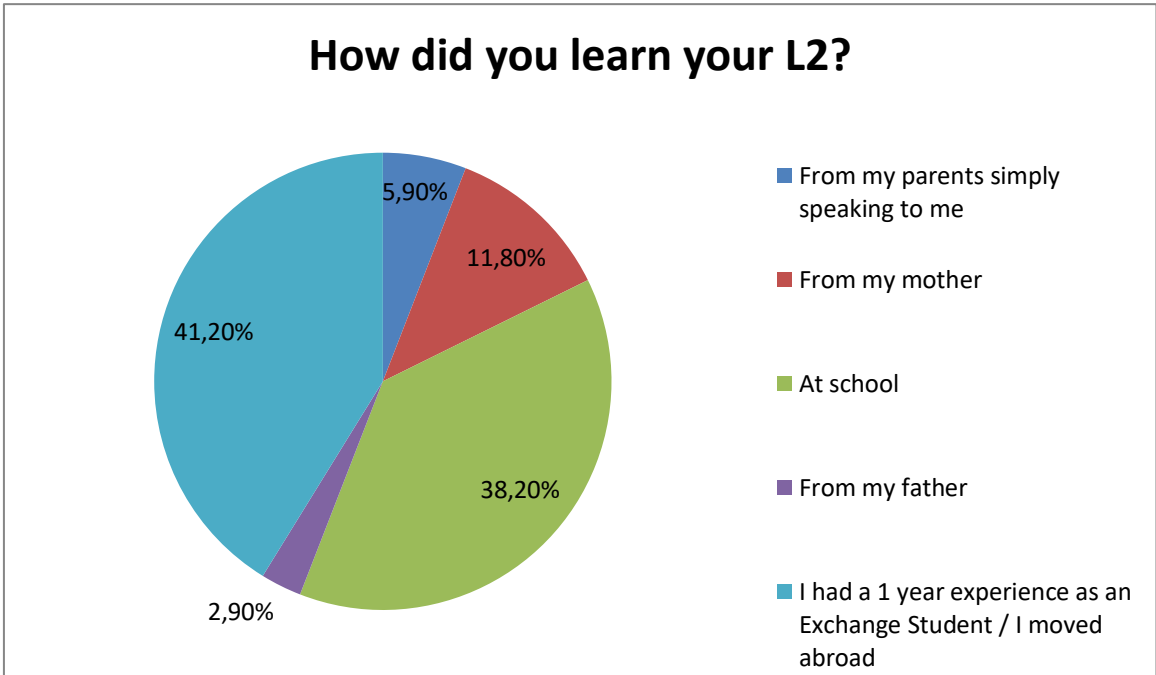
| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> 2, 3, 4. | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> 24, 17, 22, 30, 14, 2, 21, 24, 10, 12, 18. |
|--------------------------------------|---|

Nearly all late bilingual individuals seem to have learnt their L2 around their teens / twenties, (plus there is one and only case of a 30-year old person). We might assume, therefore, that such data are evidence of some general *immigration movement* of these people from their Country of origins to another (which, in this study, happens to be Italy in the majority of the cases), perhaps due to their family's need / will to emigrate, their own personal immigration initiative for studying / working purposes, etc.

On the other hand, there are also four cases of early bilingual individuals who have learnt their L2 (in their today Country for residence), at the age of, respectively, 2 – 3 – 4 (x2) years old. This phenomenon, given their very young age, can only be caused by their own family's migration abroad: explicitly, we can claim that the fact that they learnt their L2 at those specific ages was due to their parents' decision of (perhaps) starting teaching / speaking to them in that language at that time and not, (perhaps), from their birth.

4. How did you learn your L2 (*minority language)¹¹³?**

¹¹³ "A minority language is a language spoken by a minority of the population of a territory. Such people are termed linguistic minorities or language minorities." (Wikipedia, 26 June 2019, at 13:45 (UTC))



From the general graph we notice that the majority of the respondents have split according to two main choices: “*I had a 1 year experience as an Exchange Student / I moved abroad*” (41,2%) and “*at school*” (38,2%).

This data can only be explained if we take the main *late – early bilingualism* differentiation into account: indeed, it seems obvious that if a person learns an L2 because he / she “had a 1 year experience as an Exchange Student / moved abroad”, we are referring to a late-bilingualism kind of situation, whereas if a person claims to have learnt his / her L2 “at school”, it could definitely be an early bilingualism one.

In addition, the other options do not seem to count much (with respect to our *data’s counting*), being these ones, in descending order:

- a) “*from my mother*” (11,8%);
- b) “*from my parents simply speaking to me*” (5,9%);
- c) *from my father* (2,9%).

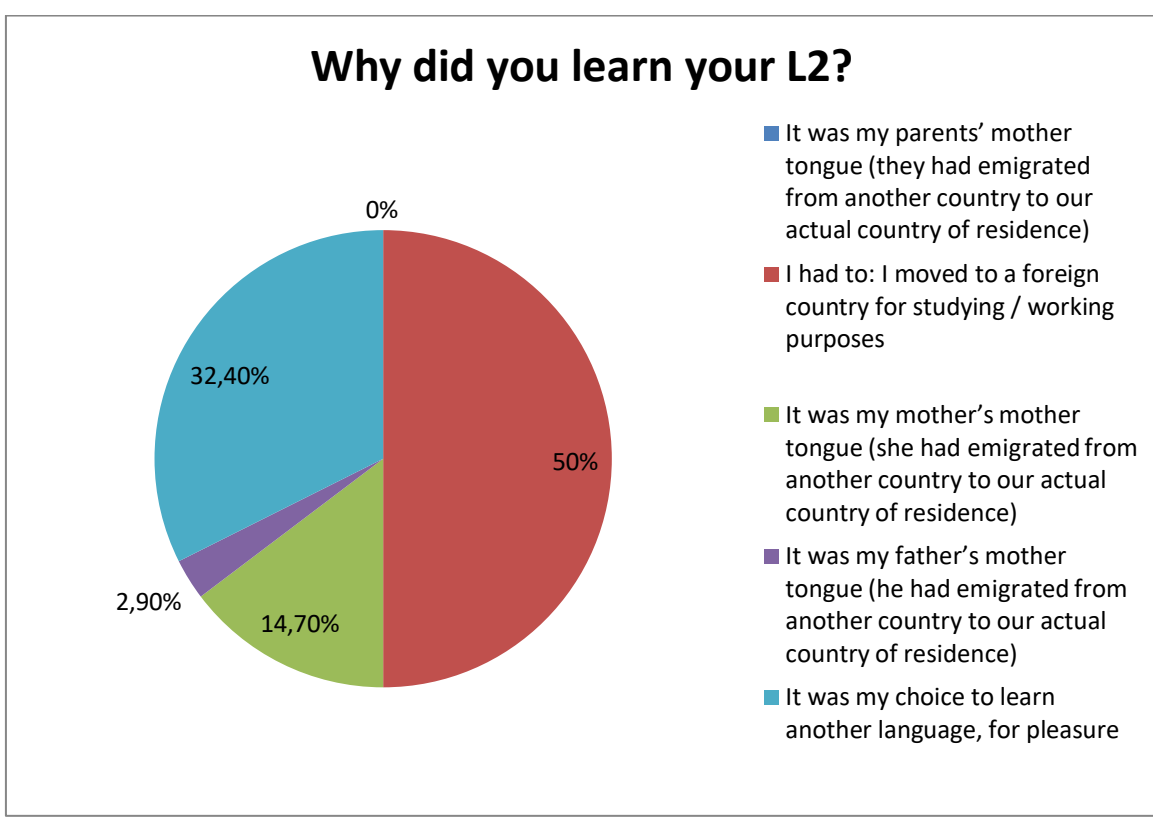
In conclusion, let us observe how the two early – late bilingual groups differentiate from one another:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--|---|
| a. From my parents simply speaking to me: 8 | a. From my parents simply speaking to me: 0 |
| b. From my mother: 5 | b. From my mother: 1 |

| | |
|--|---|
| c. At school: 6 | c. At school: 5 |
| d. From my father: 0 | d. From my father: 1 |
| e. I had a one-year Exchange-student experience abroad / I moved abroad: 0 | e. I had a one-year Exchange-student experience abroad / I moved abroad: 8 |

As previously claimed, it appears that early bilinguals' major choice is "from my parents simply speaking to me" (8) and "at school" (6), followed by "from my mother" (5), (the other options were not chosen), whereas the late bilinguals' ones are "I had a one-year Exchange-student experience abroad / I moved abroad" (8) and "at school" (5), followed by "from my mother" (1) and "from my father" (1), (the other option was not chosen).

5. Why did you learn your L2?



From what emerges in the general graph, it appears that the majority of our interviewed people are late bilinguals (since the major choices with respect to this question have been "I had to: I moved to a foreign country for studying / working purposes" (50%) and "It was my choice to learn another language, for pleasure" (32,4%), followed by

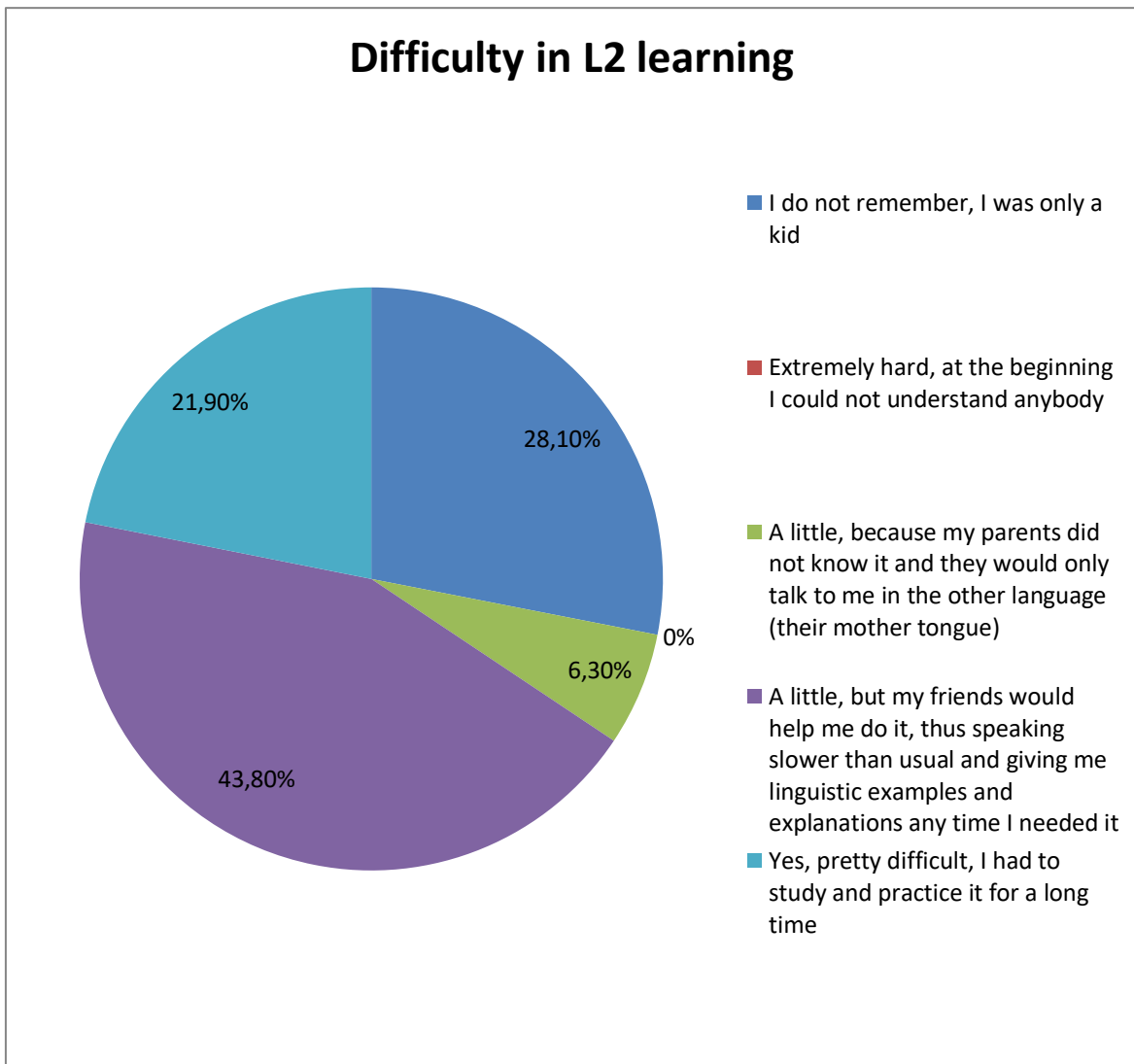
“*It was my mother’s mother tongue (...)*” (14,7%) and “*It was my father’s mother tongue (...)*” (2,9%).

If we want analyse it into more details, we see that:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--|--|
| a. It was my parents’ mother tongue (they had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence): 0 | a. It was my parents’ mother tongue (they had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence): 0 |
| b. I had to: I moved to a foreign country for studying / working purposes: 0 | b. I had to: I moved to a foreign country for studying / working purposes: 9 |
| c. It was my mother’s mother tongue (she had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence): 13 | c. It was my mother’s mother tongue (she had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence): 0 |
| d. It was my father’s father tongue (he had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence): 6 | d. It was my father’s father tongue (he had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence): 1 |
| e. It was my choice to learn another language, for pleasure: 0 | e. It was my choice to learn another language, for pleasure: 5 |

Hence, early bilinguals’ major choice is “*it was my mother’s mother tongue (she had emigrated from another country to our actual country of residence)*” (13), followed by “*it was my father’s father tongue (...)*” (6), (no other options were chosen), whereas late bilinguals’ major choices are, (as we were claiming before), “*I had to: I moved to a foreign country for studying / working purposes*” (9), followed by “*It was my choice to learn another language, for pleasure*” (5) and, in conclusion, “*it was my father’s father tongue (...)*” (1).

6. Was it hard for you to learn your L2?



With respect to this 6th graph, we notice that the respondents' answers are, overall, slightly more balanced compared to the previous questions.

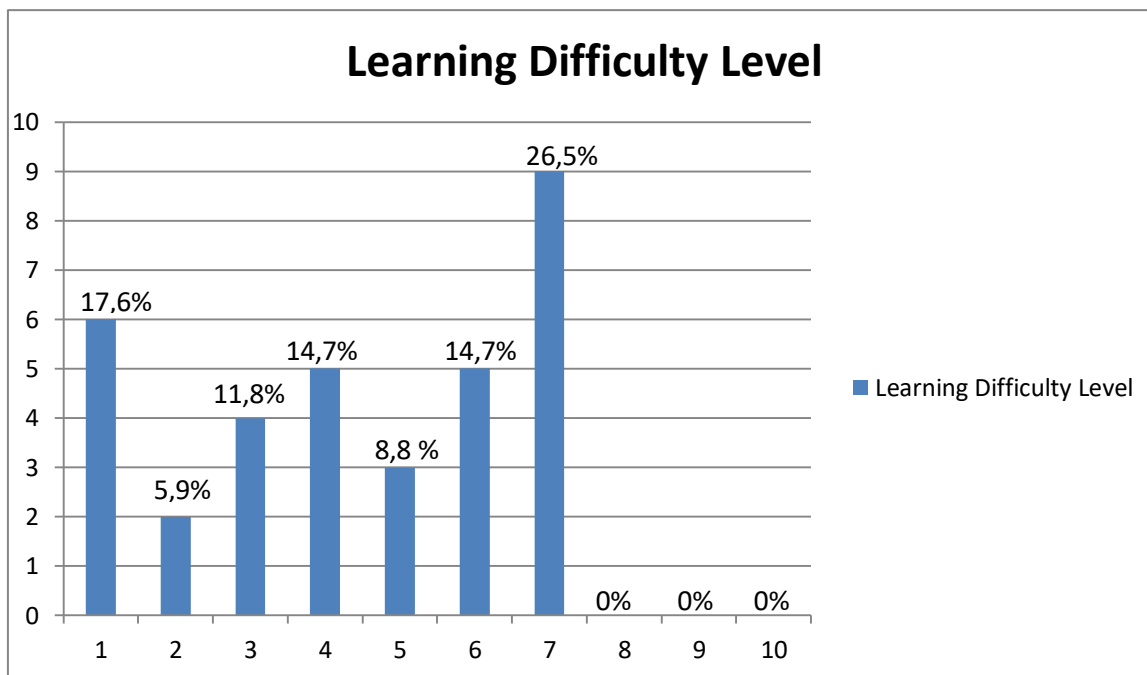
Anyway, we might highlight the fact that the majority of them (43,8%) appear to have responded *“a little, but my friends would help me do it, (...)”* (which might correspond to both early and late bilingual kind of situations), followed by *“I do not remember, I was only a kid”* (28,1%) (strictly related to an early bilingual kind of situation), and *“yes, pretty difficult, I had to study and practice it for a long time”* (21,9%) (strictly related to a late bilingual kind of situation). Only 6,3% of the candidates, in conclusion, have stated *“a little, because my parents did not know it and they would only talk to me in the other language (their mother tongue)”*, which can relate to both conditions.

In particular, we see that:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--|--|
| a. I do not remember, I was only a kid: 10 | a. I do not remember, I was only a kid: 0 |
| b. Extremely hard, at the beginning I could not understand anybody: 0 | b. Extremely hard, at the beginning I could not understand anybody: 0 |
| c. A little, because my parents did not know it and they would only talk to me in the other language (their mother tongue): 3 | c. A little, because my parents did not know it and they would only talk to me in the other language (their mother tongue): 3 |
| d. A little, but my friends would help me do it, thus speaking slower than usual and giving me linguistic examples and explanations any time I needed it: 6 | d. A little, but my friends would help me do it, thus speaking slower than usual and giving me linguistic examples and explanations any time I needed it: 8 |
| e. Yes, pretty difficult, I had to study and practice it for a long time: 0 | e. Yes, pretty difficult, I had to study and practice it for a long time: 4 |

As emphasised in the general discussion, what emerges here (as a proof / sustainment to our above hypothesis) is that the majority of early bilinguals responded “*I do not remember, I was only a kid*” (10), followed by “*a little, but my friends would help me do it, thus speaking slower than usual and giving me linguistic examples and explanations any time I needed it*” (6) and “*a little, because my parents did not know it and they would only talk to me in the other language (their mother tongue)*” (3), (no other answers were given), whereas the majority of late bilinguals chose the option “*a little, but my friends would help me do it, (...)*” (8), followed by “*yes, pretty difficult, I had to study and practice it for a long time*” (4), and “*a little, because my parents did not know it and they would only talk to me in the other language (their mother tongue)*” (3).

7. On a scale from 1 to 10, how hard was it to learn it?



From the general graph above we see that, on average, nobody found extreme difficulty in learning his / her own L2. The major value emerging from their responses' total percentage is 7 (26,5%), followed by 1 (17,6%), 4 – 6 (14,7%), 3 (11,8%), 5 (8,8%) and 2 (5,9%).

According to the early – late bilingual differentiation, moreover, we see that:

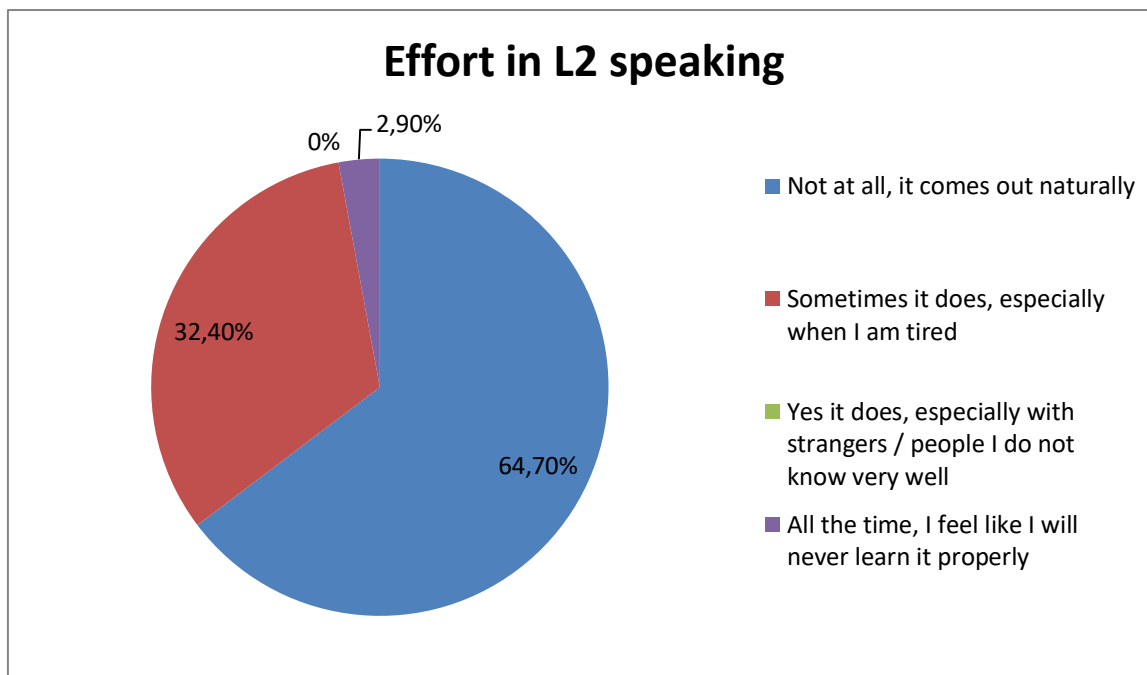
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | | | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|---|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|--|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10: | | |
| 5 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | | | | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 6 | | | | | |

Early bilinguals, in general, (given their advantageous condition of bilingualism), seem to find less difficulty in learning their L2 compared to their late bilingual peers. Indeed, if we look at the values above, we see that 5 of them have chosen the 1-value, and 1 the 2-value, while only 1 of the late bilingual ones has chosen the 1-value, and 1 the 2-value.

Correspondingly, according to the chosen maximum level of *difficulty in L2 acquisition*, we see that late bilinguals differ much from early bilinguals: with respect to the first ones, indeed, we have a “7-value: 6 people and 6-value: 3 people” correspondence, whereas with respect to the others, we have a “7 value-3 person and 6 value-2 people”.

In conclusion, we can affirm that these data demonstrate our general thesis' claim that *early bilinguals are advantaged compared to late bilinguals in L2(s) acquisition.*

8. Does it take much effort to you to speak in your own L2?



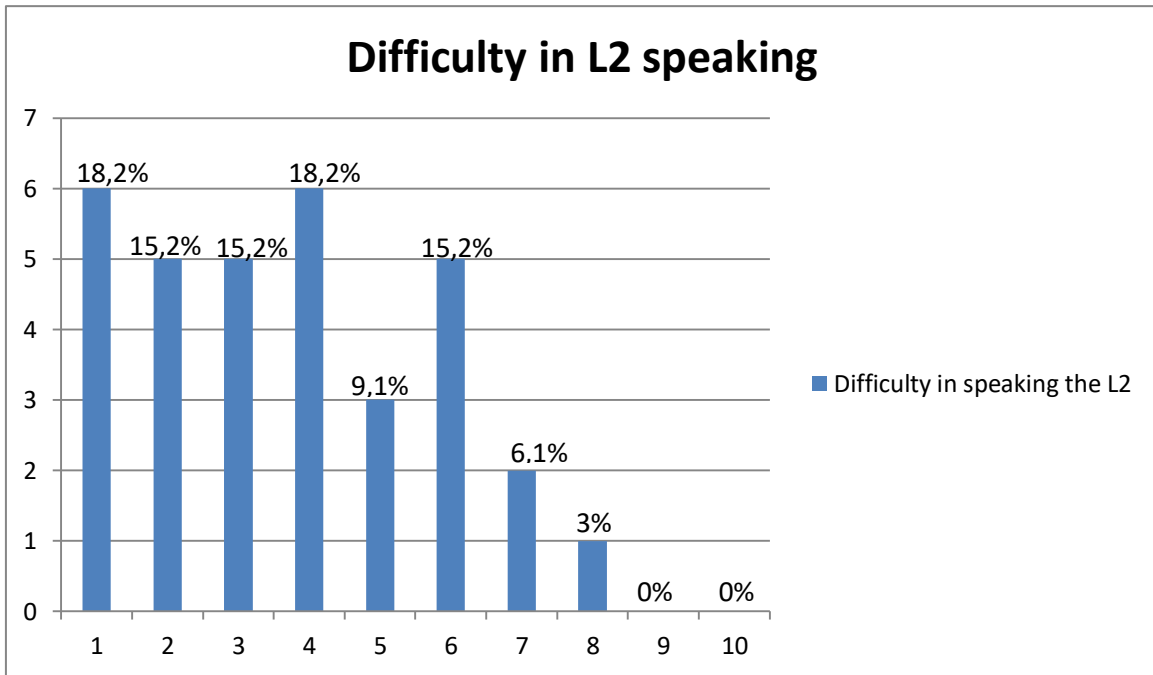
From this graph it is evident that more than half of our respondents (therefore, both early and late bilinguals, with no distinction), puts no real effort in currently speaking their L2, since 64,7% of them have selected the option “*not at all, it comes out naturally*”. After this, the second-most selected-option has been that of “*sometimes it does, especially when I am tired*” (32,4%), which we can hypothesise as being related to both kind of bilingual individuals. In conclusion, interestingly enough, 2,9% of them have responded “*all the time, I feel like I will never learn it properly*”, which might as well not only sustain our overall thesis that “*early bilinguals are generally more advantaged / “superior” to late bilinguals*”, but it can also give us a clue to the fact that, unfortunately, sometimes it is too late to learn a language properly (depending, of course, on many variables, such as *individual intelligence, personality, L2 environment / context, motivation, etc.*).

Let us have a look at this further distinction:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--|--|
| a. Not at all, it comes out naturally: 13 | a. Not at all, it comes out naturally: 12 |
| b. Sometimes it does, especially when I am tired: 6 | b. Sometimes it does, especially when I am tired: 2 |
| c. Yes it does, especially with strangers / people I do not know very well: 0 | c. Yes it does, especially with strangers / people I do not know very well: 0 |
| d. All the time, I feel like I will never learn it properly: 0 | d. All the time, I feel like I will never learn it properly: 1 |

As it appears from here, in conclusion, 13 early bilingual speakers responded “*not at all, it comes out naturally*”, and 6 of them “*sometimes it does, especially when I am tired*”, whereas 12 late bilingual speakers selected the option “*not at all, it comes out naturally*”, 2 of them “*sometimes it does, especially when I am tired*” and 1 “*all the time, I feel like I will never learn it properly*”, thus confirming our previously stated hypothesis.

9. On a scale from 1 to 10, how hard is it to speak it?



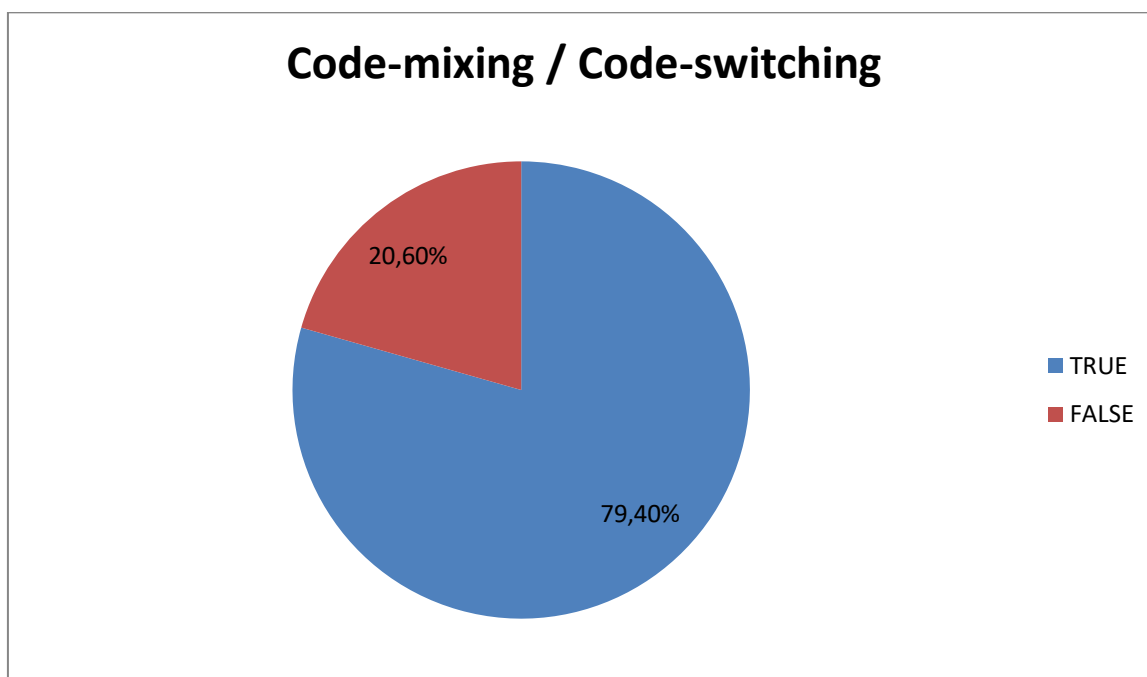
From the present, general graph it appears that, on average, all bilingual / plurilingual individuals find an average / medium difficulty in speaking their L2: precisely, 18,2% of them assigned the 4 – 1-values to their level of difficulty, followed by 2 – 3 – 6-values (15,2%), 5-value (9,1%), 7-value (6,1%), 8-value (3%), (the 9 – 10-values were not chosen by anybody).

In specific, we see that:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10: |
| 6 | 5 | 5 | 3 | | | | | | | | | | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 1 | | |

Early bilinguals seem to experience less difficulty when speaking their own L2 (thus confirming once again our general thesis' claim) compared to late bilinguals: if we look at their respective values, indeed, such discrepancy is quite visible, namely: as far as early bilinguals' choices are concerned with, we have "1: 6, 2: 5, 3: 5 and 4: 3" (thus, we see that their chosen values are quite compact on the left side (of minimum difficulty values of the linear scale), whereas, as far as the other group is concerned with, we have "4: 3, 5: 3, 6: 5, 7: 2, 8: 1", where we notice, indeed, that their choices of value-assignment are much more dispersed along the right-side of the linear scale (thus confirming, in general terms which we will not repeat here, the overall early bilingual advantages over them).

10. Sometimes, it happens that I *mix* my two (or more) languages while I'm speaking.



From the general graph we notice a clear predominance of *affirmative* answers “*TRUE*” (79,4%) with respect to *negative* answers “*FALSE*” (20,6%).

From this result, therefore, we might hypothesise that nearly all of our bilingual respondents are quite proficient in / confident with respect to both / all of their languages, to the point that they are aware of / and can manage, if it occurs, the incidence of such mechanical phenomenon.

With respect to those who, on the other hand, appear not to be *mixing* / *switching* their languages when presently speaking, we might hypothesise that these are mainly early bilingual individuals (who have learnt their languages from birth or from a very early stage of their life, and have interiorised the fact that they *must not do it when speaking*, since they have probably been induced (all their lives) by their parents / teachers / (monolingual people in general) *to not make such “errors”*. However, these could also be late bilinguals who do not mix / switch them (as the others of above would do) as an attempt to facilitating the communication / conveying their meanings when interacting

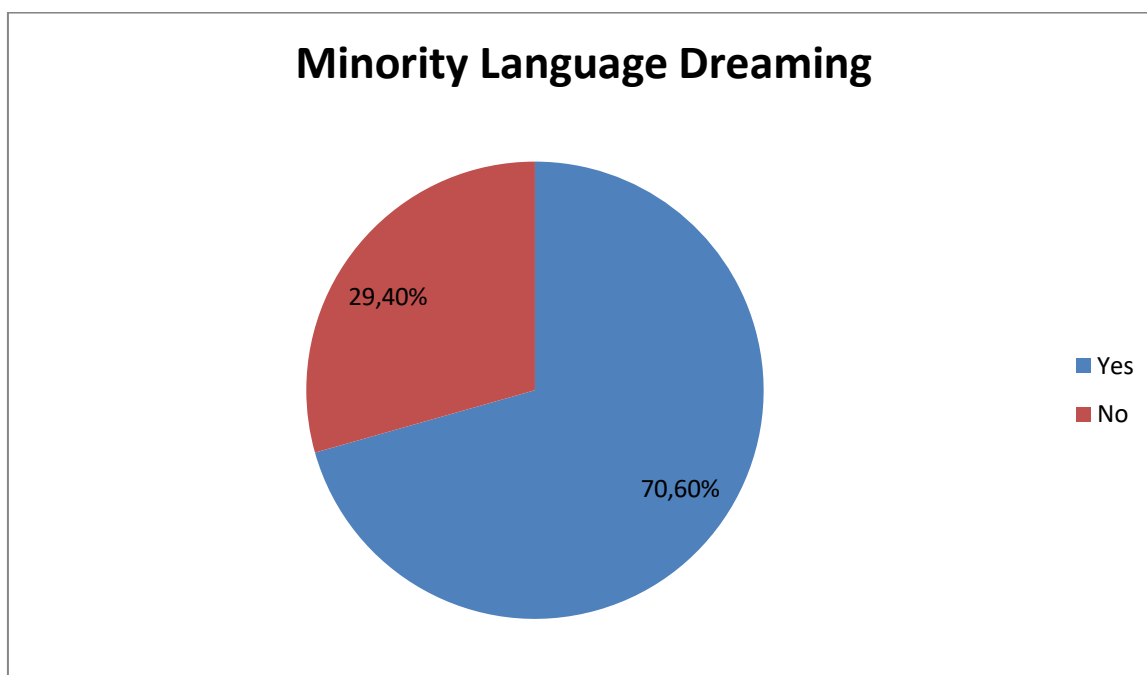
with / speaking to somebody, but they would rather (perhaps) stop the communicative flow.

Therefore, as we can see from the table below:

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> TRUE: 13 FALSE: 6 | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> TRUE: 14 FALSE: 1 |
|--|---|

The majority of both groups (as already showed in the general graph) and, precisely, *13* early bilinguals and *14* late bilinguals, have positively affirmed to be mixing / switching their languages when speaking, whereas only *6* early bilinguals and *1* late bilingual negated the occurrence of such phenomenon.

11. Do you ever dream in your other (minority) language?



From what appears in the general graph, it seems quite common for bilingual / plurilingual individuals (both early and late) to be dreaming, (at times or more often than not), even in their own minority languages (therefore, not only in their own dominant language): see the above total percentages of "Yes" (70,6%) and "No" (29,4%).

Therefore, we can positively assume that this is not a rare nor “weird” phenomenon, if found in many circumstances in relation to many different people.

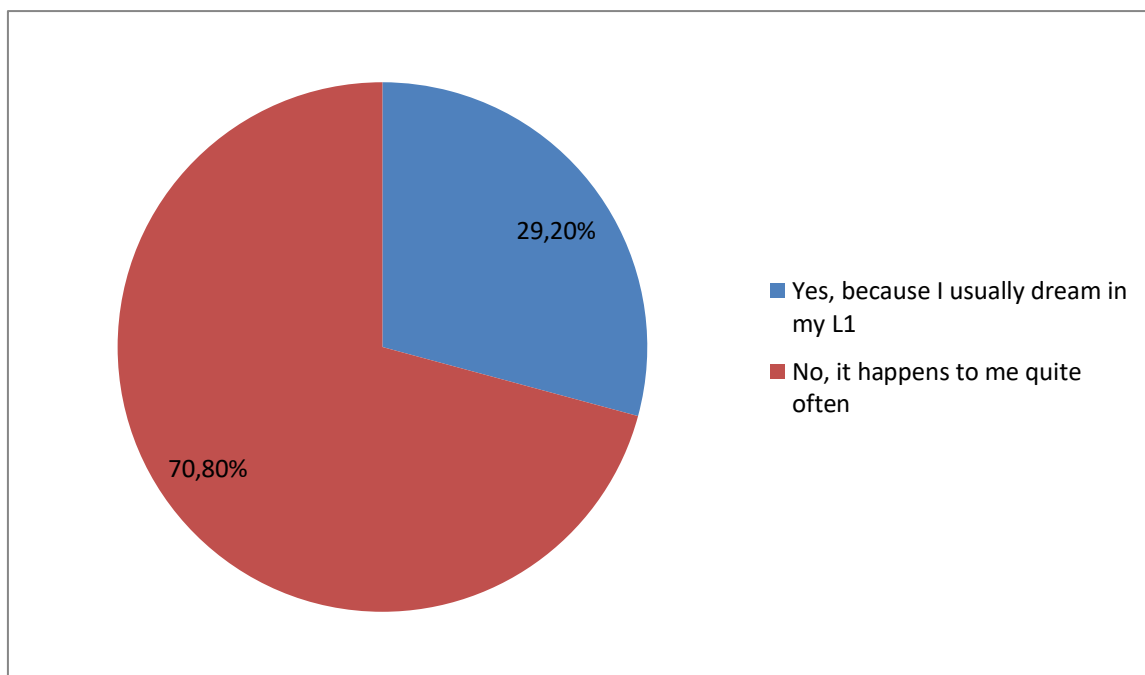
In particular, as we see from the next Table’s results:

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> Yes: 15 No: 4 | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> Yes: 13 No: 2 |
|---|--|

Both early and late bilingual people confirm (in majority), (correspondingly, 15 early bilinguals and 13 late bilinguals) that they do indeed dream in their minority language, whereas only 4 early bilinguals and 2 late bilinguals negate such evidence.

In conclusion, we can assume that being an early bilingual or a late one, in this case, does not make a real big difference, since both of them (groups) appear to be affected by such phenomenon. Whenever one learns a new language, in other words, this might mean that he / she will also possibly dream in it.

12. In case you replied “Yes” in the previous question, does this surprise you?



As it emerges from the present graph, the majority of the bilingual / plurilingual (70,8%) people have responded “no, it happens to me quite often”, whereas only 29,2% of them have affirmed “yes, because I usually dream in my L1”.

However, as this matter is not strictly related to our main purpose of establishing the bilinguals / plurilinguals’ cognitive / cultural / social advantages over monolinguals, we will leave this discussion here, pointing just to the following further differentiation between:

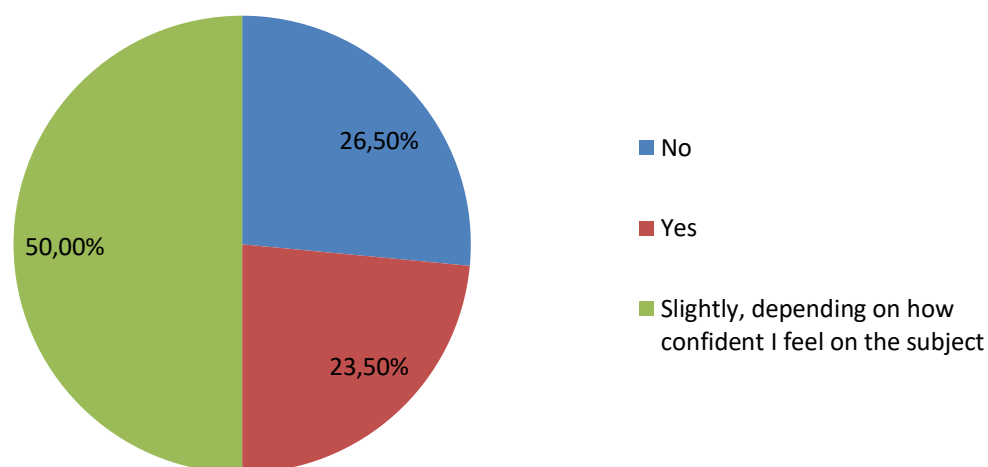
| | |
|---|---|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
| Yes, because I usually dream in my L1: 5 | Yes, because I usually dream in my L1: 2 |
| No, it happens to me quite often: 14 | No, it happens to me quite often: 13 |

Early bilinguals, hence, appear more often to be affected by such incidence, as 14 of them said “no, it happens to me quite often”, whereas only 5 stated “yes, because I usually dream in my L1”. On the same line are also late bilingual individuals, since 13 of them selected the “no, it happens to me quite often” option, and 2 the other one “yes, because I usually dream in my L1”.

6.3.2. Types of Bilingualism / Plurilingualism and Metalinguistic Awareness

13. Is it hard for you to talk about specialized fields (scientific subjects, for instance, such as informatics, economics, philosophy, etc.) in your own L2?

Difficulty in Specialised Language speaking



As it appears in the graph above, half (50%) of the bilingual / plurilingual population (of our research) claims that it is “*slightly hard for them to talk about specialised fields, depending on how confident they feel on the subject*”, whereas the other half is split between the two positive / negative voices, relatively “*yes*” (23,5%) and “*no*” (26,5%).

In order to analyse such finding, we might claim that, as far as the first result (that of 50%) is concerned with, this data is rather understandable since anybody (early / late bilinguals, but also monolinguals themselves) might rely on their own specific-matter’s degree of knowledge, before they actually start producing / claiming something.

With respect to the other two options, on the other hand, the situation is slightly less clear / more complicated, because: on one hand, such ability could be found “hard” to manage by late bilinguals who just started learning their L2(s) or who, in general, do not possess a high proficiency in it, or by early bilinguals who do not possess that specific specialised vocabulary knowledge; on the other, it could not be found “hard” by both groups of bilinguals / plurilinguals, given the opposite conditions present, with respect to the other ones (which have just been explained).

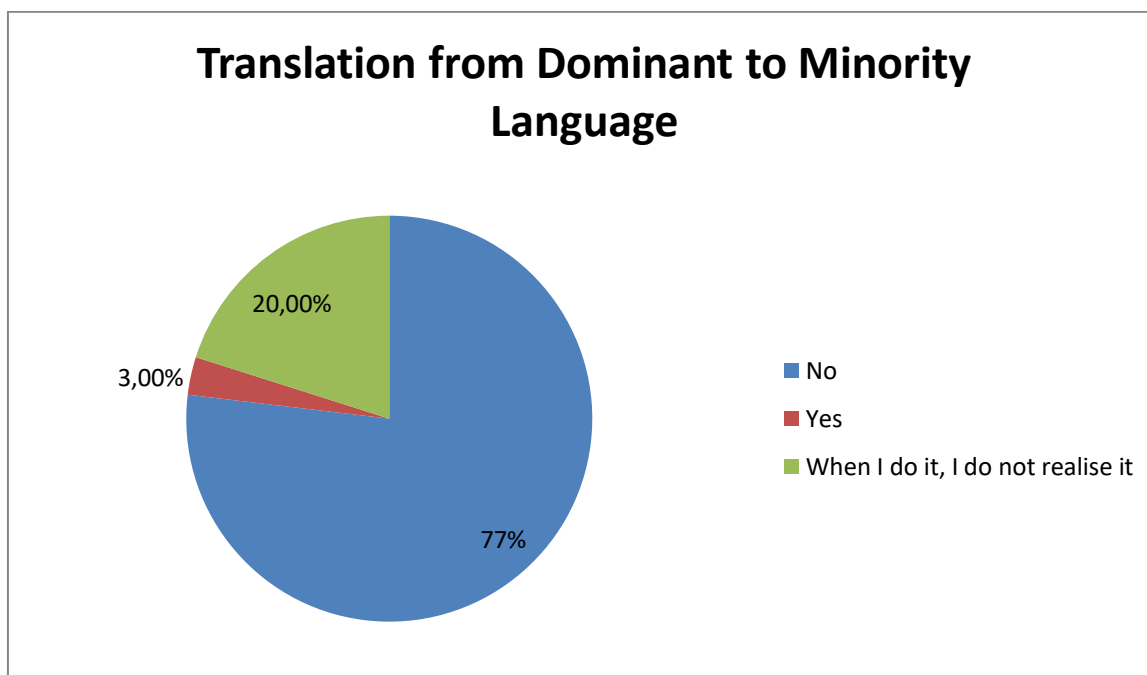
Let us have a look at the early / late bilingual results:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| a. No: 3 | a. No: 7 |
| b. Yes: 4 | b. Yes: 3 |

| | |
|---|--|
| c. Slightly, depending on how confident I feel on the subject: 12 | c. Slightly, depending on how confident I feel on the subject: 5 |
|---|--|

As the Table above shows, indeed, there is another particular data which is worth mentioning: the major data (7) corresponding to late bilinguals' choices is "no", and this can be taken as a further confirmation of our thesis' claim, which presumes "late bilinguals' inferiority to early bilinguals (with respect to many already-cited factors / dimensions)."

14. When speaking your minority language, do you think first in your *dominant language¹¹⁴ and then translate it into your minority language?**



What emerges from this graph is that the majority of our bilingual / plurilingual respondents prescind from translating what they want to say from their dominant language onto the other (minority) language. Indeed, 77% of their choices is on "no", 20% is on "when I do it, I do not realise it" (fact which also presumes a good fluency /

¹¹⁴ "The dominant language is the language with which a bilingual or multilingual speaker has greatest proficiency and/or uses more often." (Colorin Colorado; s.d.)

naturalness in their speaking of their own L2 , given the fact that, hence, they do not mentally “control” what they are saying word per word) and, in conclusion, only 3% is on “Yes”.

These results seem to be confirming the fact that, therefore, people learning their L2(s), in general, do not usually use their mother tongue(s) as a “back up” resource to help themselves with when they need to communicate with others using the minority language.

Let us have a further look at the results:

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
| a. No: 16 | a. No: 10 |
| b. Yes: 0 | b. Yes: 1 |
| c. When I do it, I do not realise it: 3 | c. When I do it, I do not realise it: 4 |

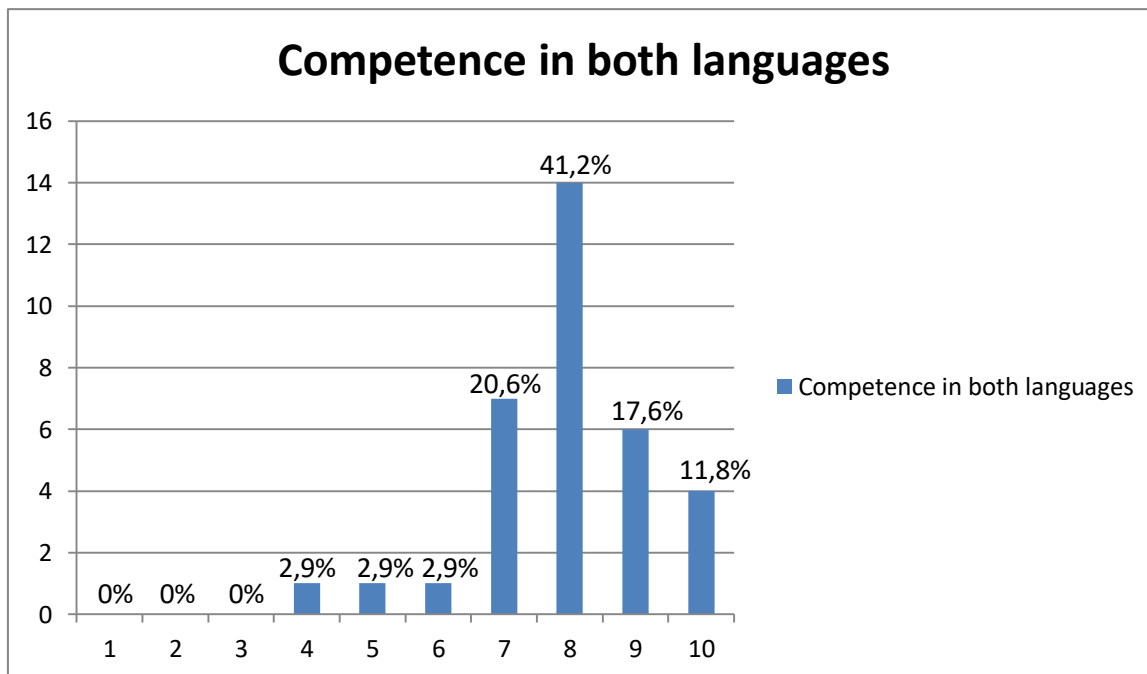
One significant data which emerges from this second Table, therefore, is that the only person claiming “*to translate from his / her dominant language to his / her minority language when speaking*” is a late bilingual one. This information, once again, is in line with our main thesis’ claim.

15. In case you answered “Yes” in the previous question, can you explain us why?

As a consequence of the previous question, one and only individual (a late bilingual one), has responded to this question, thus saying: “*perchè non ho ancora padronanza della lingua.*”

There is no need to say (or better said, to repeat), that such phenomenon might happen as a consequence of the *age factor*: indeed, it is possible that adult learners (in contrast to children / young learners) might not eventually (completely) learn a new language, even if they would like / need to.

16. On a scale from 1 to 10, how competent do you feel yourself in using both languages?



As it appears from the general graph, the average early / late bilingual speaker feels rather confident in speaking both / all of his / her languages. Indeed, as the linear scale evidences, the major chosen-value by our respondents is “8”, with a percentage of 41,2% of choices. The other following values, in decreasing order, are: 7 (20,6%), 9 (17,6%), 10 (11,8%), and 6 – 5 – 4 (2,9%).

As claimed in the lines above, therefore, we can state that all of them feel to possess a high level of confidence in both / all of their languages (since nearly all of their choices, except one and only on the 4-value, are above the medium value in the linear scale (5)).

Let us have a more precise look at the early / late bilingual results:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
| | | | | | 1 | 3 | 9 | 3 | 3 | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 |

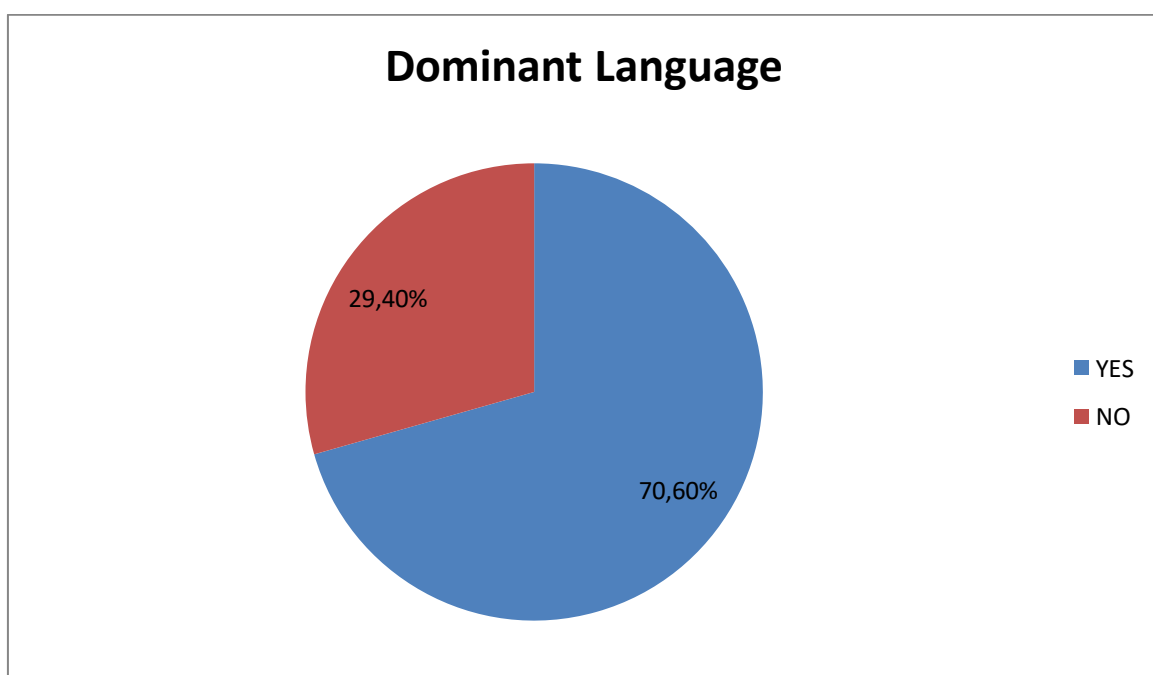
The maximum value (in terms of number of choices) of the early bilinguals is “8”, with 9 choices, followed by “10 – 9 – 7”, with correspondingly 3 choices, and “6” with 1 and only choice. No choices were made with respect to the 4 – 5-values.

With respect to the late bilingual group, on the other hand, we see that the major value (in terms of number of choices) is still “8”, but with a neat reduced percentage in terms of quantity of choices, namely (4), followed by “9 – 7” (3), 10 (2), and finally “4 – 5 – 6” (1).

The only further conclusion we might draw, therefore, is that late bilinguals feel slightly less competent in both / all of their languages (compared to early bilinguals), since it was one of them who chose the value equal to 4. Moreover, the percentages (in terms of number of choices) of the higher values (8 – 9 – 10) do also seem to be reduced compared to the other group.

(P.S.: As it is becoming clear step by step, we are demonstrating nearly in all questions the trueness of our thesis’ general claim).

17. Do you have one dominant language, meaning that you feel more comfortable using it, compared to the other one?



As the graph above shows, a high percentage (70,6%) of our bilingual / plurilingual respondents affirm to have one dominant language, meaning that they feel more comfortable in using it, compared to the other language(s). Consequently, only 29,4% of them negated such instance.

Let us see if there are any differences between early and late bilingual individuals:

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
| Yes: 5 | Yes: 11 |
| No: 14 | No: 4 |

As we were about to demonstrate, there is indeed a big difference between early bilinguals and late bilinguals. The majority of the first ones (14), as it appears above, affirm *not to have a dominant language*, and this sustains our general thesis' commitment, that *early bilinguals, in general, have a balanced knowledge of both / all of their languages since they learnt them when they were only children / very young, therefore at the maximum point of their linguistic acquisition potentials / abilities (in other words, in the best / major "critical period" of their lives).*

On the other hand, the majority of late bilinguals (11), affirmed *to have a dominant language*, and this *also sustains, as a counterpart, the thesis' claim we have just mentioned.*

18. In case you answered "Yes" in the previous question, can you explain us why?

With respect to this question, we will just list both early bilinguals' and late bilinguals' answers (in their mother tongue), because they themselves explain their reasons / opinions on it, and because we could not explain / argue / demonstrate anything else other than that.

Early bilinguals:

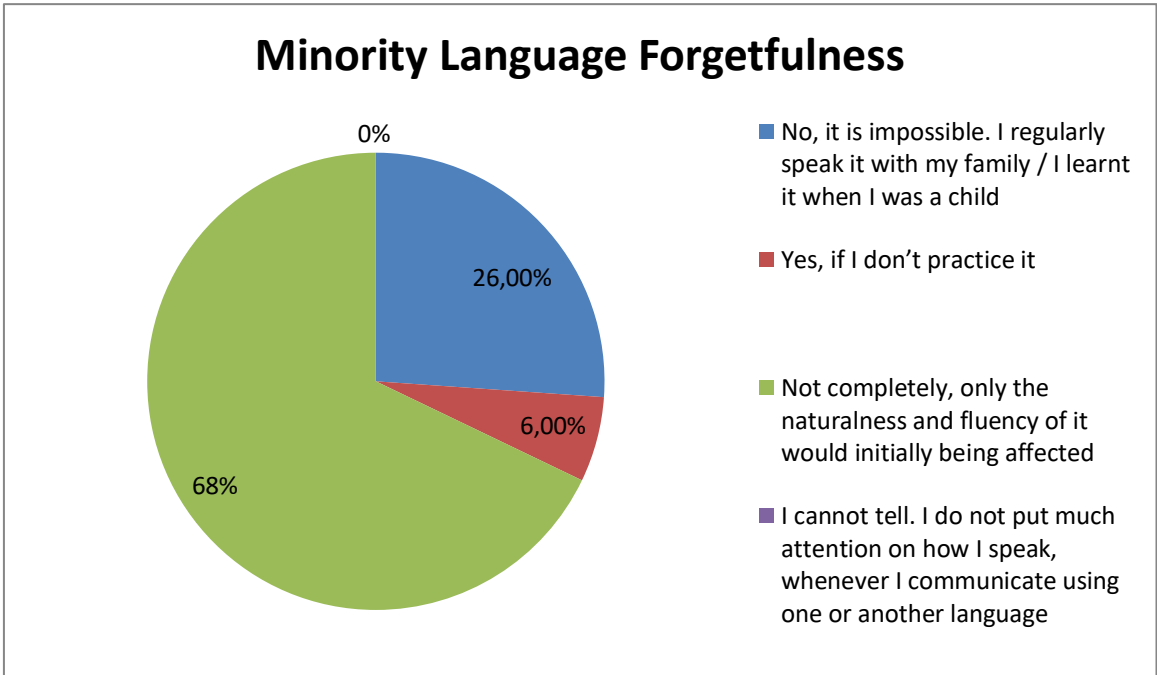
- a) *Italiano, perché vivo ancora in Italia.*
- b) *Italiano, perché è la lingua che parlo più spesso.*
- c) *Italiano perché è la lingua che parlo correntemente.*

- d) *Italiano, quando racconto di eventi della mia vita in Italia. Inglese, quando racconto di eventi successi negli Stati Uniti. È come se ricordi e persone si dividano in due gruppi. Quando penso, rifletto, mi faccio male, di solito succede in italiano.*
- e) *Italiano, perché sono abituata ad usarlo sempre mentre l'altra lingua la uso solo con mia madre.*

Late bilinguals:

- f) *Persian! Because I was born and raised in Iran. I have never studied Italian and only speak it to a certain degree because now I'm living in Italy (less than 2 years since I came here).*
- g) *Inglese, perché ho studiato formalmente in quella lingua.*
- h) *Italiano, perché ormai lo uso più della mia lingua nativa.*
- i) *L1 perché ora la uso più spesso.*
- j) *L1 perché sono cresciuto e letto la maggior parte dei libri in quella lingua, avendo anche gran parte delle amicizie che parlano L1.*
- k) *Spagnolo perché è simile all'italiano.*
- l) *Il francese, mia lingua materna.*
- m) *Mi sento più a mio agio a parlare utilizzando la mia L1 (italiano) perché ho maggiori competenze linguistiche.*
- n) *L1, perché la L2 è stata imparata in modo più approfondito tardivamente. Ci sono degli ambiti in cui manca del vocabolario ed in ogni caso è più dispendioso per me a livello di concentrazione usare la L2. D'altro canto, ci sono degli ambiti/termini imparati nella L2 che mi è difficile trattare/usare nella L1 senza sfociare nel code-mixing.*
- o) *L1 perché la parlo da sempre.*
- p) *L2.*

19. Do you think it is possible to forget your minority language?



As it appears from the graph, 68% of the respondents affirmed “*not completely, only the naturalness and fluency of it would initially being affected*”, followed by 26% of “*no, it's impossible. I regularly speak it with my family / I learnt it when I was a child*”, and 6% of “*yes, if I don't practice it*”.

Let us have a look at how and to what degree the differentiation among early and late bilinguals might have influenced such result:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--|--|
| a. No, it is impossible. I regularly speak it with my family / I learnt it when I was a child: 6 | a. No, it is impossible. I regularly speak it with my family / I learnt it when I was a child: 0 |
| b. Yes, if I don't practice it: 1 | b. Yes, if I don't practice it: 7 |
| c. Not completely, only the naturalness and fluency of it would initially being affected: 12 | c. Not completely, only the naturalness and fluency of it would initially being affected: 8 |
| d. I cannot tell. I do not put much attention on how I speak, whenever I communicate using one or another language: 0 | d. I cannot tell. I do not put much attention on how I speak, whenever I communicate using one or another language: 0 |

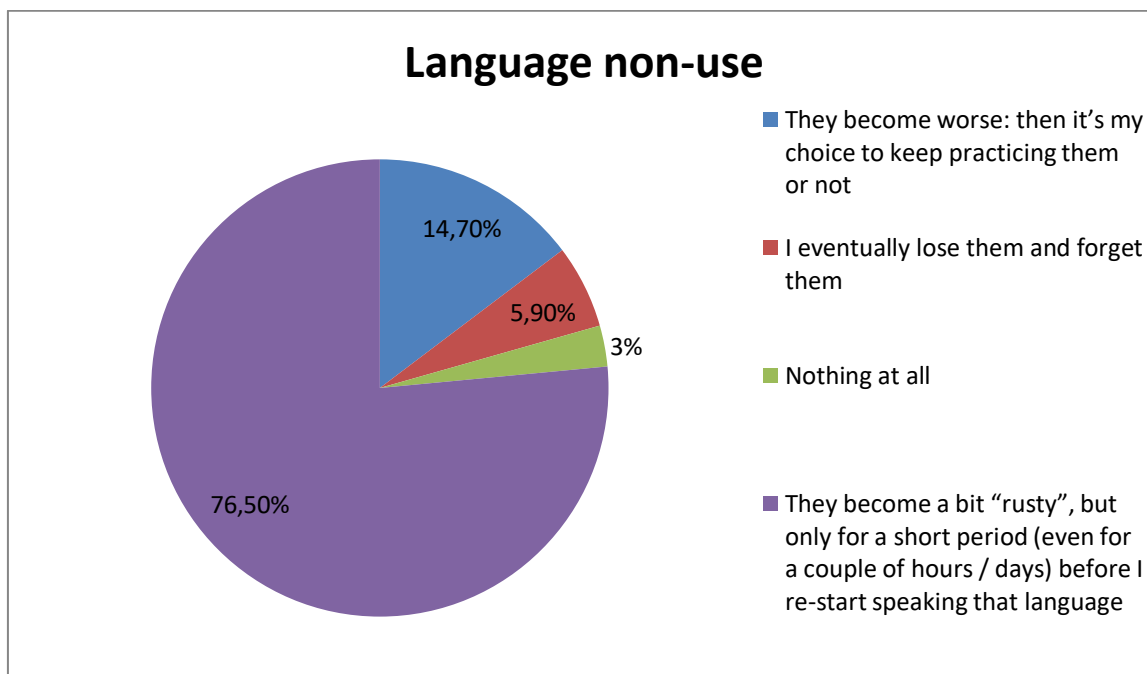
As the Table above shows, the majority (12) of early bilinguals responded “*not completely, only the naturalness and fluency would initially being affected*”, followed

by (6) “no, it is impossible. I regularly speak it with my family / I learnt it when I was a child”, and, in conclusion, by (1) “yes, if I don’t practice it”.

On the other hand, late bilinguals’ major response (8) has been on “not completely, only the naturalness and fluency of it would initially being affected”, followed by (7) “yes, if I don’t practice it”.

The main difference between the two groups, therefore, appears to be the following one: late bilinguals are more likely to forget their minority language (compared to early bilinguals) if they don’t practice it (see the relative different values, 7 and 1). Moreover, none of the late bilinguals declared the impossibility of such event happening (“no, it is impossible. I regularly speak it with my family / I learnt it when I was a child”), compared to early bilingual individuals (6 of them) who stated that they regularly speak it with their family / learnt it when they were children.

20. What happens to your language skills (of one of your languages) if you do not use that language for a period of time?



As it appears from the graph above, the majority of our candidates (76,5%) affirm that “they become a bit “rusty”, but only for a short period (even for a couple of hours / days) before I re-start speaking that language”, followed by (14,7%) of “they become

worse: then it's my choice to keep practicing them or not", (5,9%) of "I eventually lose them and forget them", and (3%) of "nothing at all".

Before claiming anything regarding the reasons of such choices, let us see if we find some kind of demonstration to it in the next Table:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|---|--|
| a. They become worse: then it's my choice to keep practicing them or not: 1 | a. They become worse: then it's my choice to keep practicing them or not: 5 |
| b. I eventually lose them and forget them: 1 | b. I eventually lose them and forget them: 2 |
| c. Nothing at all: 1 | c. Nothing at all: 0 |
| d. They become a bit "rusty", but only for a short period (even for a couple of hours / days) before I re-start speaking that language: 17 | d. They become a bit "rusty", but only for a short period (even for a couple of hours / days) before I re-start speaking that language: 8 |

As it appears, indeed, both the majority of early bilinguals (17) and late bilinguals (8) have affirmed that their abilities "become a bit "rusty", but only for a short period (even for a couple of hours / days) before I re-start speaking that language".

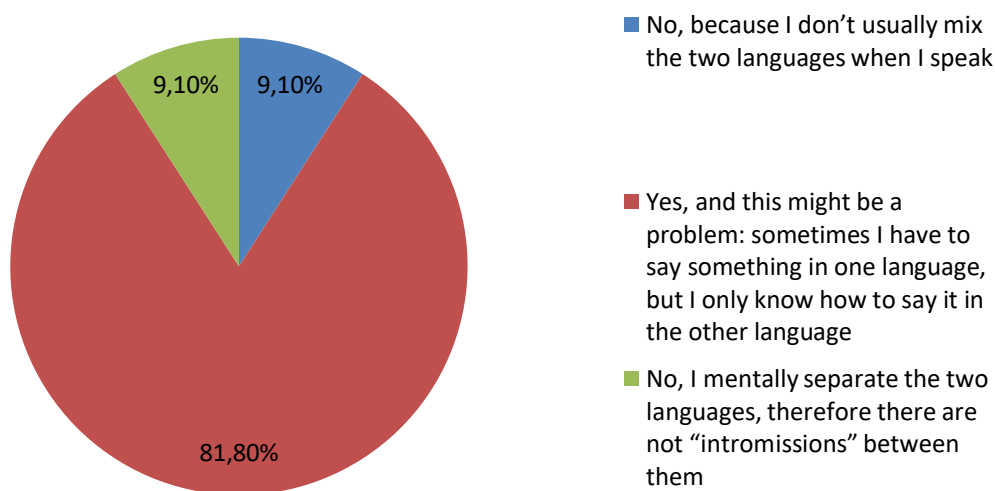
What makes a real difference here is the fact that 2 late bilinguals (in contrast to 0 early bilinguals) responded "I eventually lose them and forget them", whereas 1 early bilingual (and 0 late bilinguals) said "nothing at all".

This data, once again, supports our thesis' claim regarding *early bilinguals' superiority / advantages with respect to late bilinguals*.

6.3.3. Advantages of Bilingualism and Self-Consideration on Bilingualism / Plurilingualism

21. Do you feel that, being a bilingual / plurilingual, you have a richer vocabulary at your disposal in order to express your ideas / opinions / feelings?

Bilingual / plurilingual vocabulary richness



The evidence emerging from the graph is that the majority of both early / late bilingual people (81,8%) affirms such instance, claiming *“yes, and this might be a problem: sometimes I have to say something in one language, but I only know how to say it in the other language”*, followed by an equal percentage (9,1%) of them claiming *“no, because I don't usually mix the two languages when I speak”* and *“no, I mentally separate the two languages, therefore there are not “intrusions” between them”*.

Let us now have a further look at the specific results:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--|--|
| a. No, because I don't usually mix the two languages when I speak: 3 | a. No, because I don't usually mix the two languages when I speak: 0 |
| b. Yes, and this might be a problem: sometimes I have to say something in one language, but I only know how to say it in the other language: 13 | b. Yes, and this might be a problem: sometimes I have to say something in one language, but I only know how to say it in the other language: 15 |
| c. No, I mentally separate the two languages, therefore there are not “intrusions” between them: 3 | c. No, I mentally separate the two languages, therefore there are not “intrusions” between them: 0 |

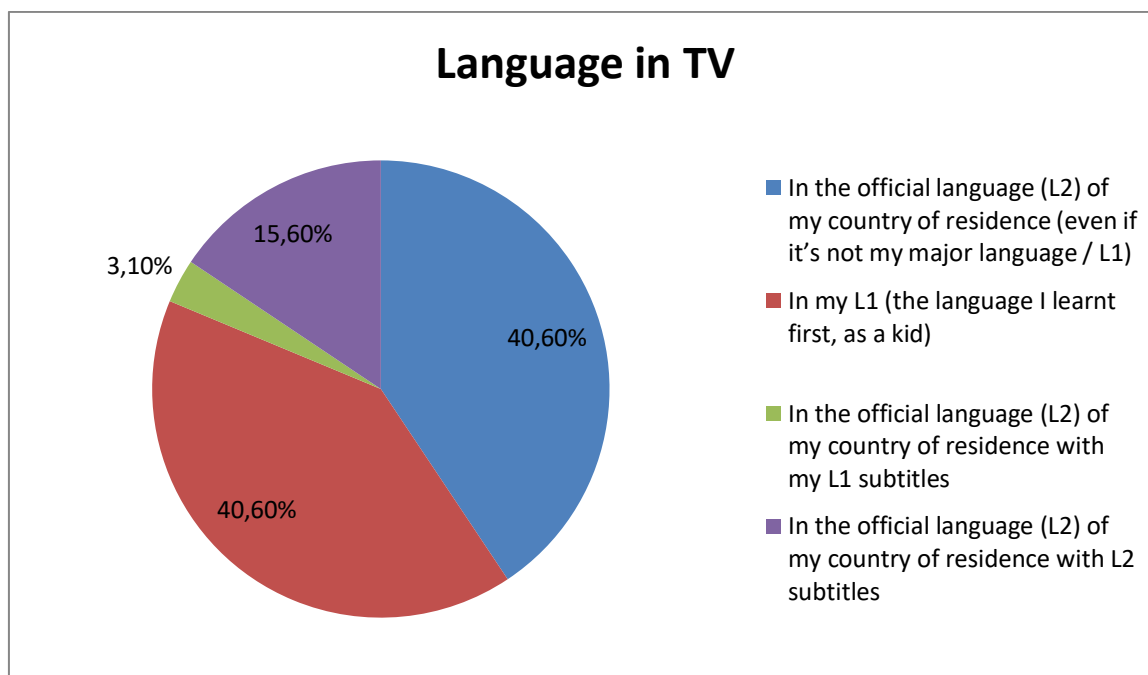
As it appears in the Table above, (and as we were claiming before), both the majority of early (13) and late (15) bilingual people have affirmed *“yes, and this might be a*

problem: sometimes I have to say something in one language, but I only know how to say it in the other language”.

The only difference worth mentioning here is that all late bilinguals have given the same answer, whereas it was some early bilinguals who slightly differed in their responses, such as: *“no, because I don’t usually mix the two languages when I speak” (3)* and *“no, I mentally separate the two languages, therefore there are not “intrusions” between them” (3).*

The reason behind these choices might be dictated by how their own process of bi-/pluri-/linguistic acquisition might have taken place in their own lives and influenced their own way of *thinking* and *systematizing language(s)*.

22. When you watch TV (movies / series / documentaries / etc.), in which language do you watch it?



Interestingly enough, what emerges from the present graph is a very peculiar data: the two major answers *“in my L1 (the language I learnt first, as a kid”* and *“in the official language (L2) of my country of residence (even if it’s not my major language / L1)* have been chosen by the same exact amount of people, namely by 40,6% of them. This data might imply that each individual is unique and different from another one, therefore it

does not matter if one is an early or late bilingual person, since he or she will always have one preference on his / her own with respect to such behaviours / choices (such as watching TV in one or another language).

The minor data (choices), consequently, are “*in the official language (L2) of my country of residence with L2 subtitles*” (15,6%) and “*in the official language (L2) of my country of residence with my L1 subtitles*” (3,1%).

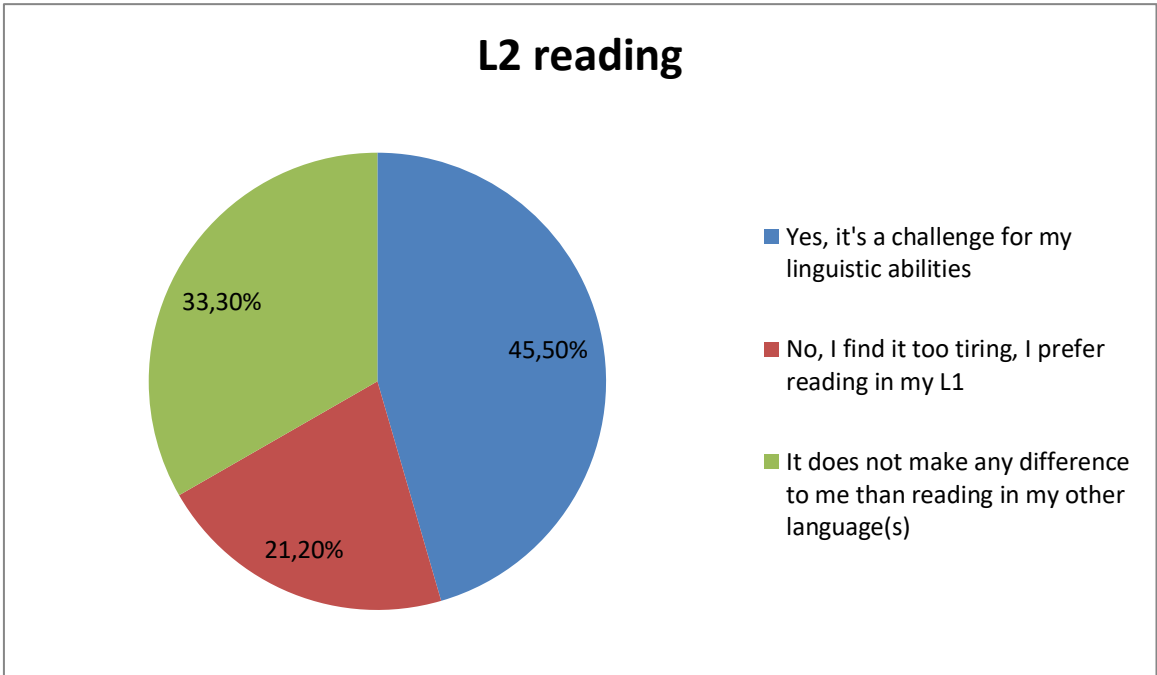
These results, overall, might imply a sort of “*all or nothing*” condition: a bilingual / plurilingual individual mostly watches TV in his / her L1 or in his / her L2, without (in the majority, but not all cases) using the subtitles.

Let us have a more precise look at the early / late bilingual results:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|---|---|
| a. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence (even if it's not my major language / L1): 9 | a. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence (even if it's not my major language / L1): 8 |
| b. In my L1 (the language I learnt first, as a kid): 9 | b. In my L1 (the language I learnt first, as a kid): 5 |
| c. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence with my L1 subtitles: 0 | c. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence with my L1 subtitles: 1 |
| d. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence with L2 subtitles: 1 | d. In the official language (L2) of my country of residence with L2 subtitles: 1 |

As previously demonstrated, (therefore, it will not be repeated here), the two major choices (along with the minor ones) of both groups have been the ones which have just been pointed out and explained.

23. Do you like reading in your own L2 (minority language)?



According to this general graph, we have a positive trend towards the matter asked in such question: indeed, 45,5% of our respondents declare “*yes, it’s a challenge for my linguistic abilities*”, followed by 33,3% of “*it does not make any difference to me than reading in my other language(s)*” and, in conclusion, 21,2% of “*no, I find it too tiring, I prefer reading in my L1.*”

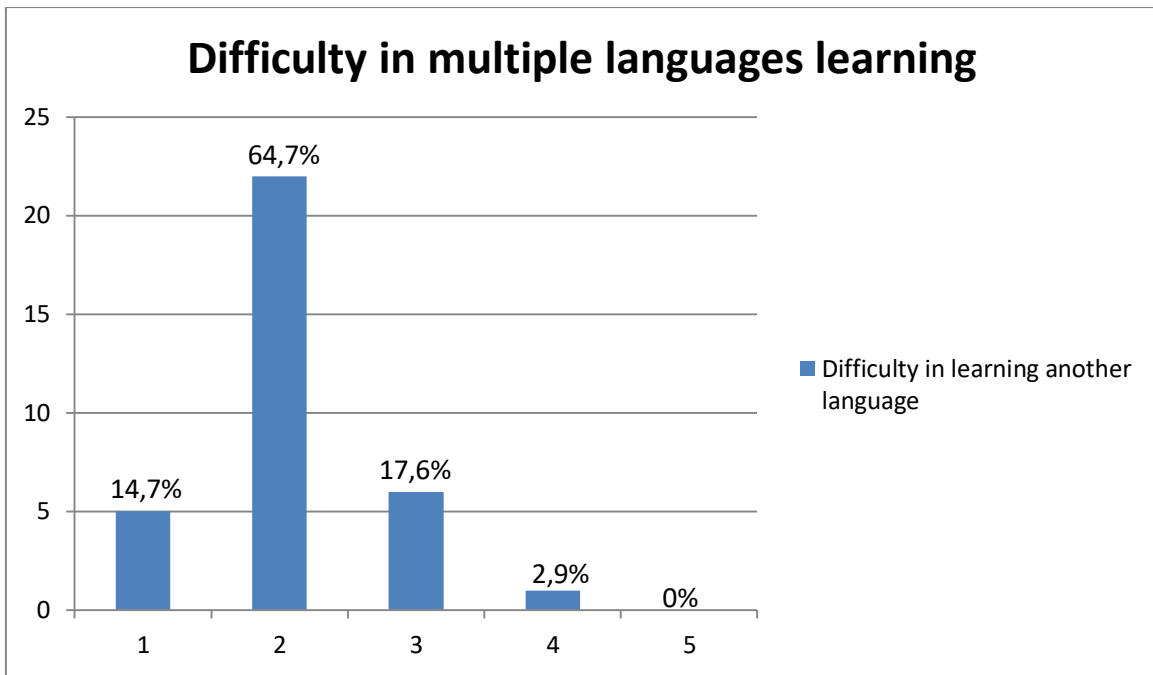
As it appears from these results, therefore, the majority of our bilingual / plurilingual population likes linguistic challenges, hence they would rather read a book in their L2 than in their L1; moreover, only a small percentage of them would keep reading in their own original L1.

Let us see if early bilinguals differ from late bilinguals with respect to such behaviour / phenomenon:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--|--|
| a. Yes, it’s a challenge for my linguistic abilities: 10 | a. Yes, it’s a challenge for my linguistic abilities: 6 |
| b. No, I find it too tiring, I prefer reading in my L1: 3 | b. No, I find it too tiring, I prefer reading in my L1: 4 |
| c. It does not make any difference to me than reading in my other(s) language(s): 6 | c. It does not make any difference to me than reading in my other(s) language(s): 5 |

No real differences are found in the analysis of the above Table, hence we can claim that, regardless of the early – late differentiation type of bilingualism, both kind of bilinguals prefer reading in their own L2 (perhaps as a medium / modality to keep that language knowledge / proficiency strong / high).

24. On a scale from “not at all hard” to “extremely hard / hardly impossible”, how hard do you think it would be for you to learn another language?



As the above graph shows, a neat majority of bilingual / plurilingual candidates (64,7%) has chosen the “a little hard” value, followed by 17,6% of “hard”, 14,7% of “not at all hard”, and finally 2,9% of “very hard”.

In order to better understand and contextualise such results, let us observe the following Table:

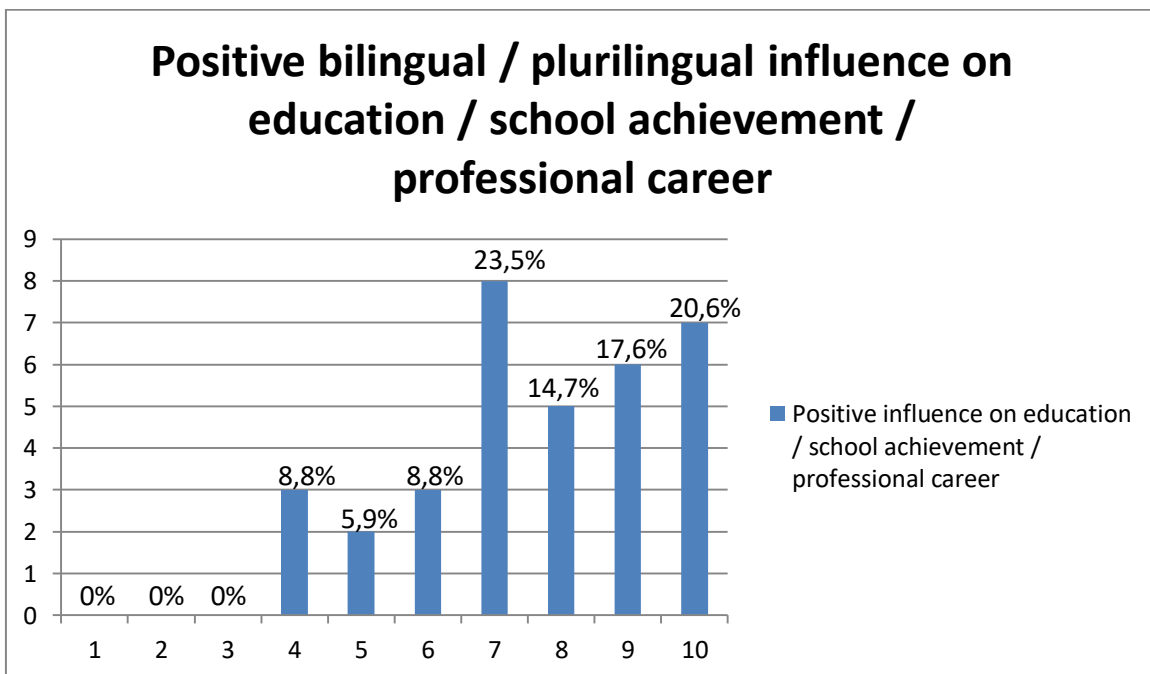
| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
| <i>Not at all hard (1) A little hard (2)</i> | <i>Not at all hard (1) A little hard (2) Hard</i> |
| <i>Hard (3) Very hard (4) Extremely hard</i> | <i>(3) Very hard (4) Extremely hard /</i> |
| <i>/ Hardly impossible (5)</i> | <i>Hardly impossible (5)</i> |
| 1: 4 | 1: 1 |

| | |
|------|-------|
| 2: 9 | 2: 13 |
| 3: 6 | 3: 0 |
| 4: 0 | 4: 1 |
| 5: 0 | 5: 0 |

As the Table demonstrates, (and as we have already observed in the previous graph), the majority of both groups has chosen the “*a little hard*” value. The main difference here is that early bilinguals’ chosen values do not go over the “*hard*” value (once again demonstrating their “superiority” to late bilinguals), and having a bigger amount of choices (4) with respect to the “*not at all hard*” value.

Late bilinguals, on the other hand, have 1 choice of the “*very hard*” value and 1 and only choice of the “*not at all hard*” value, (thus demonstrating our general thesis, as always).

25. On a scale from 1 to 10, how much your bilinguality / plurilinguality (in terms of linguistic knowledge) positively affected your education / school achievement / professional career?



As it appears from the above graph, in general, our bilingual / plurilingual respondents have a positive opinion regarding their bilingual / plurilingual influence on such dimensions of life.

Precisely, 23,5% of them selected the value 7, followed by, in decreasing order, 10 (20,6%), 9 (17,6%), 8 (14,7%), 6 - 4 (8,8%), and 5 (5,9%).

Let us have a more precise look at the early / late bilingual results:

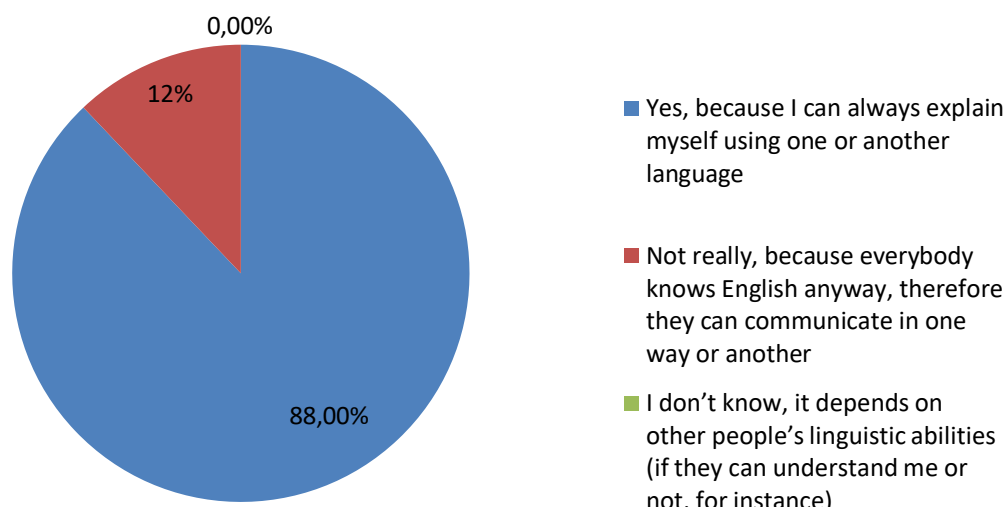
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| | | | | 1 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | | | | | 2 | 1 | | 3 | 2 | 2 | 5 |

These further results confirm what we have just claimed in the general graph analysis. One only data worth mentioning is that the only 2 people conferring the value 4 to their bilingual / plurilingual influence on many domains of their lives have been late bilinguals.

This aspect, therefore, might confirm our thesis' claim that, in general, early bilinguals are advantaged (and in this specific case, might *feel advantaged*), compared to their late bilingual peers, for knowing more than one language.

26. When you go travelling, do you feel more comfortable knowing that you are bilingual / plurilingual?

Bilingual / plurilingual Comfortability abroad



A great majority (88%) of our bilingual / plurilingual population has responded “yes, because I can always explain myself using one or another language”, followed only by 12% of them, claiming “I don't know, it depends on other people's linguistic abilities (if they can understand me or not)”.

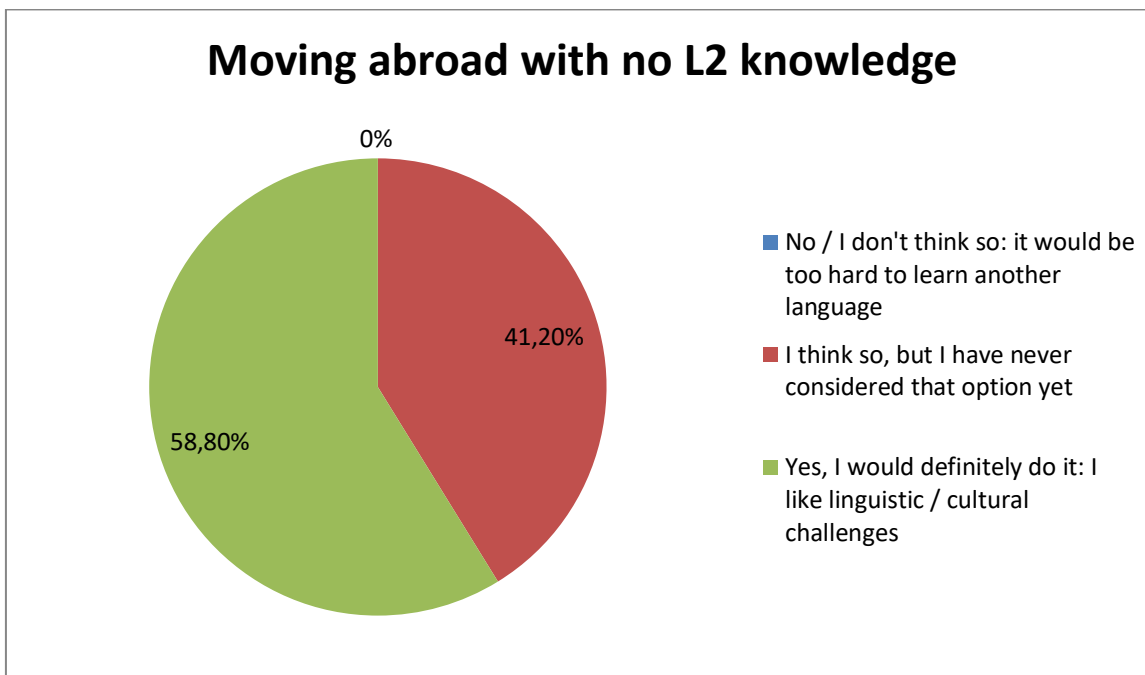
Therefore, this data clearly shows the overall potential bilingual individuals' advantages over monolinguals when they are found in “out of the comfort zone” situations, such as when they are abroad or, in general, among people who do not speak their L1.

According to the early / late bilingual differentiation, we see that:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|--|--|
| a. Yes, because I can always explain myself using one or another language: 17 | a. Yes, because I can always explain myself using one or another language: 13 |
| b. Not really, because everybody knows English anyway, therefore they can communicate in one way or another: 0 | b. Not really, because everybody knows English anyway, therefore they can communicate in one way or another: 0 |
| c. I don't know, it depends on other people's linguistic abilities (if they can understand me or not, for instance): 2 | c. I don't know, it depends on other people's linguistic abilities (if they can understand me or not, for instance): 2 |

Our previous hypothesis is confirmed, (hence, there is no need to explain these further data, since they are clearly a reflection of the first graph's ones).

27. Would you move abroad if you didn't know the language of the country of destination?



This graph's results, once again, demonstrate the bilingual / plurilingual individuals' tendency to *positively consider / exploit* their special condition of bilinguality / plurilinguality.

Nonetheless, we see that 58,8% of them have replied "*yes, I would definitely do it: I like linguistic / cultural challenges*", 41,2% have answered "*I think so, but I have never considered that option yet*", while nobody denied such possibility.

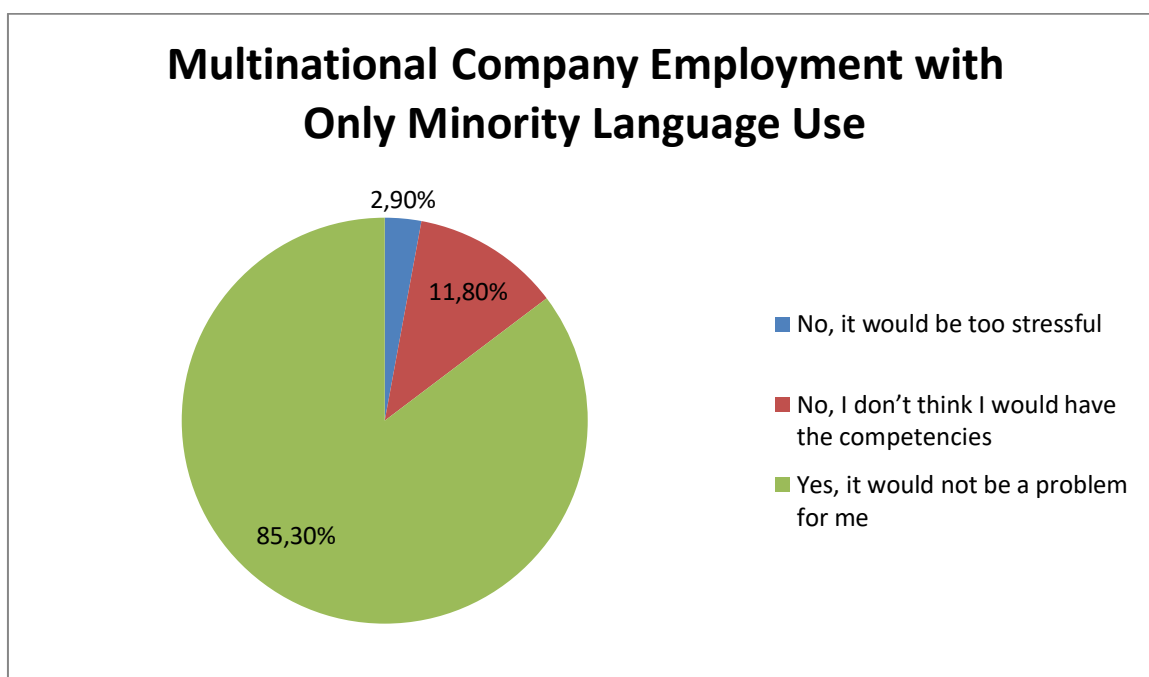
If we look at the respective early and late bilinguals' answers, we see that:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
|---|---|
| a. No / I don't think so: it would be too hard to learn another language: 0 | a. No / I don't think so: it would be too hard to learn another language: 0 |
| b. I think so, but I have never considered that option yet: 7 | b. I think so, but I have never considered that option yet: 5 |
| c. Yes, I would definitely do it: I like | c. Yes, I would definitely do it: I like |

| | |
|---|---|
| linguistic / cultural challenges: 12 | linguistic / cultural challenges: 10 |
|---|---|

The previous general data are confirmed.

28. Would you work in a multinational company which requires you to speak only your minority language (not the one spoken in your country of residence / your L1)?



From the present graph we have one major emerging data: the majority (85,3%) of our candidates have responded “*yes, it would not be a problem for me*”, thus demonstrating, (as in the previous question), their ability / will / self-confidence and pride to conduct such *life-style*, meaning that they would open up to such major and most successful possibilities in today’s world.

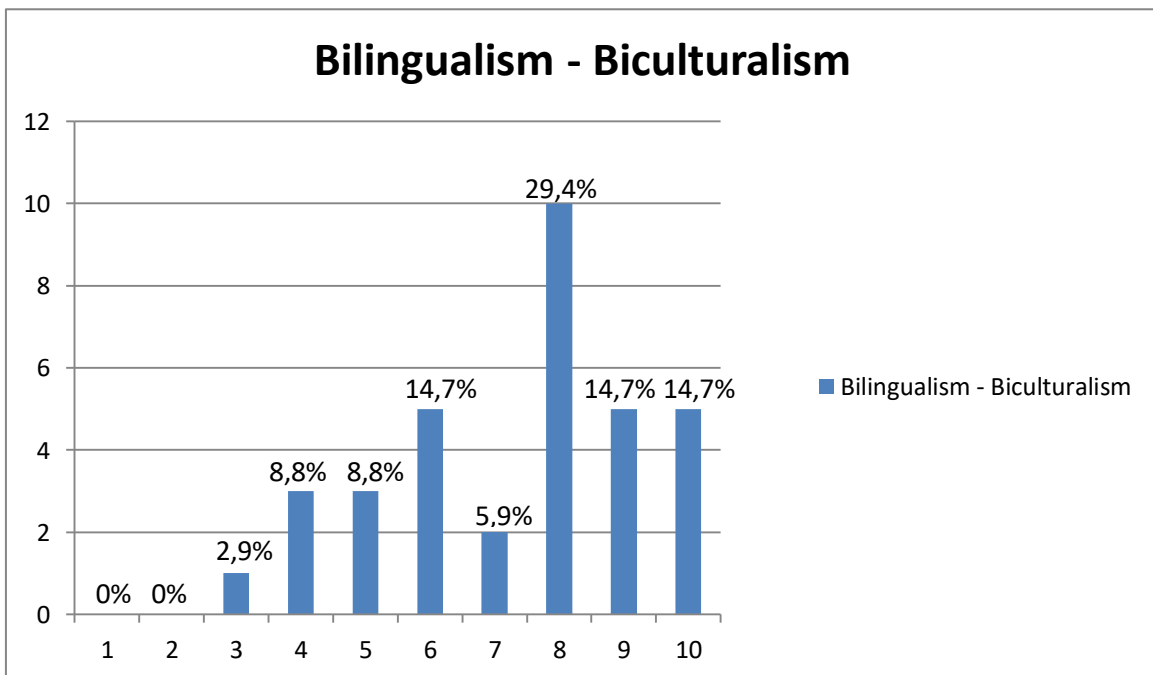
On the other hand, only 11,8% of them have responded “*no, I don’t think I would have the competencies*” and 2,9% “*no, it would be too stressful*”: this data, from our point of view (and in line with our general claim of the thesis), supports the hypothesis that the only late bilingual individuals with a low L2 linguistic proficiency could claim so.

Let us see if our hypothesis is correct:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Early bilinguals:</i></p> <p>a. No, it would be too stressful: 0</p> <p>b. No, I don't think I would have the competencies: 0</p> <p>c. Yes, it would not be a problem for me: 19</p> | <p><i>Late bilinguals:</i></p> <p>a. No, it would be too stressful: 1</p> <p>b. No, I don't think I would have the competencies: 2</p> <p>c. Yes, it would not be a problem for me: 12</p> |
|--|---|

As we wanted to demonstrate before, it is indeed the only late bilingual individuals who would claim (with respect to such employment) that “no, it would be too stressful” (1), or “no, I don't think I would have the competencies” (2). (This, once again, confirms our general thesis' claim).

29. On a scale from 1 to 10, (being yourself bilingual / plurilingual), how much do you consider yourself also *bicultural*¹¹⁵?



As we notice in this graph, this time we have a more dispersed opinion regarding this issue. Indeed, we have many evidences (in reality) of bilingual / plurilingual people who

¹¹⁵ “of, relating to, or including two distinct cultures.” (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2019)

are (perhaps) perfectly integrated into society, but still maintains their own *life-style / culture / languages* inside their homes and other domestic / familiar spheres.

In any case, let us analyse the graph above: we see that the majority of our respondents (29,4%) selected the value 8 (in accordance with their degree of *biculturalism*), followed (in decreasing order), by 10 – 9 – 6 (14,7%), 5 – 4 (8,8%), 7 (5,9%) and 3 (2,9%).

Therefore, such results are not at all bad in terms of *positive degree of biculturalism* felt by our bilingual / plurilingual individuals, but still we see that some of them have assigned rather low values with respect to their own degree of biculturalism.

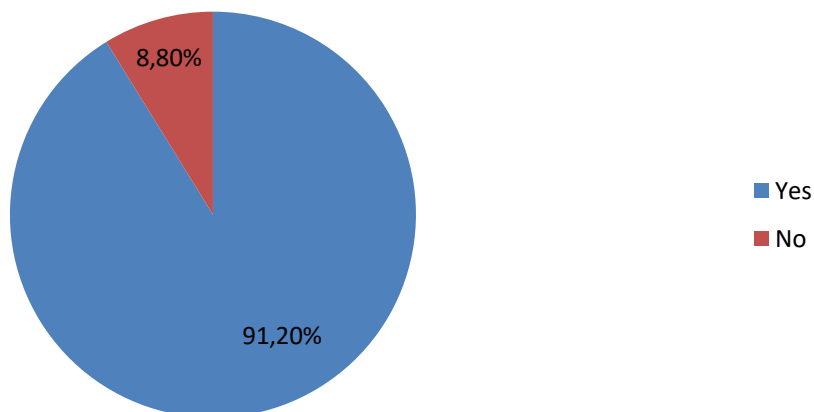
Let us see if the early bilingual / late bilingual sphere has an influence / impact on such choices:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| | | | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 3 | | | 1 | 1 | | 3 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 |

Our general hypothesis seems to be confirmed, and no other important information emerges from the analysis of this second Table, therefore no further explanation will be given here.

30. Has it ever happened to you to “mediate” between people belonging to different linguistic / cultural groups?

Mediation between different linguistic / cultural groups



A vast majority of choices (91,2%), here, has fallen on “yes”, indeed. Only 8,8% of them has responded “no”, as a matter of fact.

This data, (which could also be of interest to monolingual people found in inter-relational / inter-communicative situations), emphasise the important role of bilingual / plurilingual individuals in today’s society, given its now irreversible multilingual / multicultural nature.

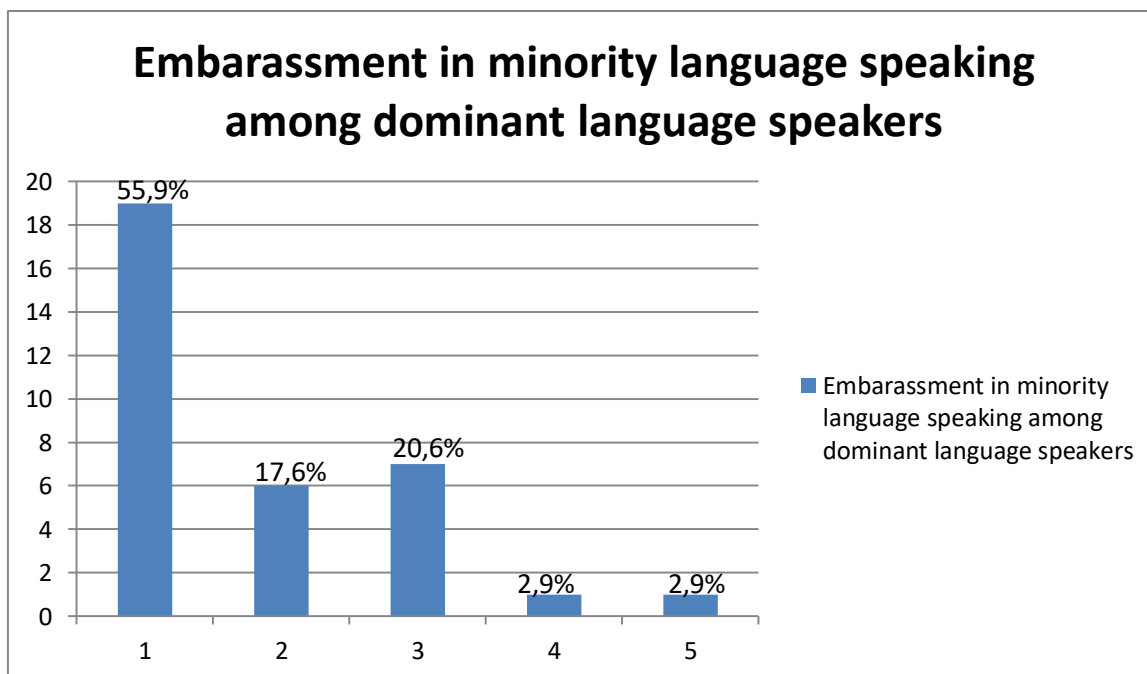
As a matter of fact, there will always be (an increasing) need of interlinguistic / intercultural mediators among such different people / societies, therefore such bilingual / plurilingual people’s existence is something which must, indeed, being promoted and given the right, deserved value.

Let us see some further data among early and late bilinguals:

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
| Yes: 17 | Yes: 14 |
| No: 2 | No: 1 |

No further explanation, from our point of view, needs to be given here with respect to these further results, as the overall important data have already been analysed above.

31. On a scale from “not at all” to “extremely”, how much does it embarrass you to speak in your own minority language among majority language speakers?



The important data emerging from this graph is that the majority of our bilingual / plurilingual candidates (55,9%) has responded “not at all” to such question, followed (in decreasing order), by “it does, normally / on average” (20,6%), “a little” (17,6%), and “a lot” – “extremely” (2,9%).

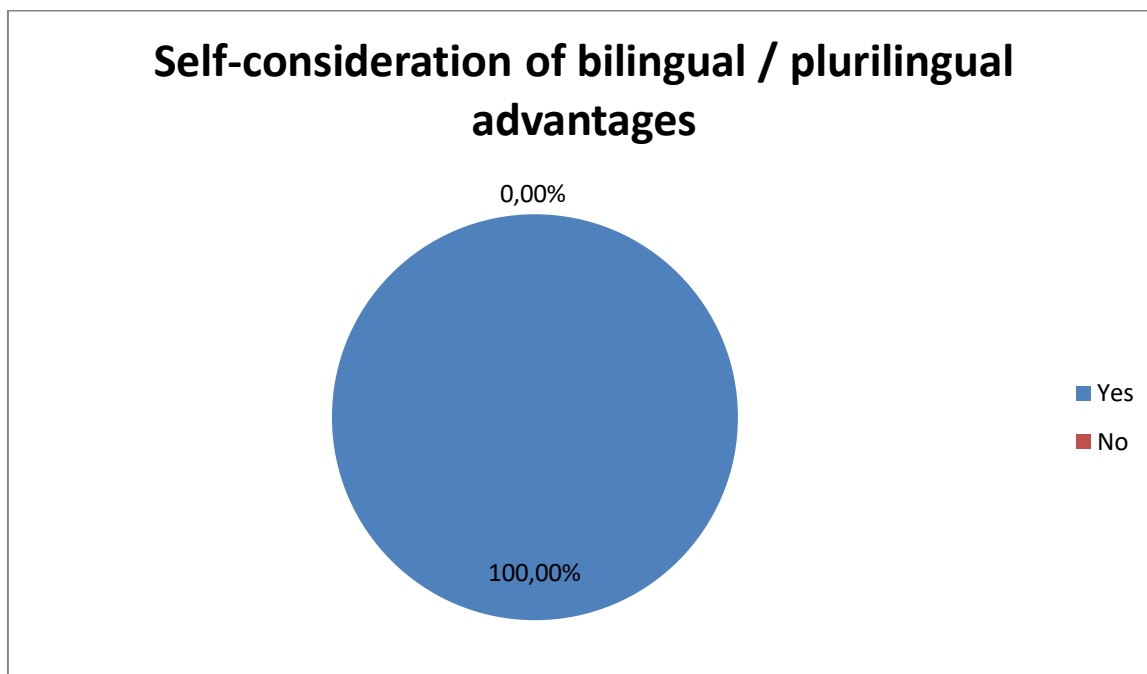
Let us see if there are any main differences among early and late bilinguals with respect to such phenomenon / feeling:

| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | | | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|---|-------------------------|----------------------|---|
| <i>Not at all (1)</i> | <i>A little (2)</i> | <i>It does, normally / On average (3)</i> | <i>Not at all (1)</i> | <i>A little (2)</i> | <i>It does, normally / On average (3)</i> |
| <i>A lot (4)</i> | <i>Extremely (5)</i> | | <i>A lot (4)</i> | <i>Extremely (5)</i> | |
| 1. 12 | | | 1. 9 | | |
| 2. 4 | | | 2. 2 | | |
| 3. 5 | | | 3. 2 | | |
| 4. 0 | | | 4. 1 | | |
| 5. 0 | | | 5. 1 | | |

As we were expecting to happen, the only people who said “*a lot*” (1) and “*extremely*” (1), are late bilingual people.

The reason behind their choices could be the fact that, (perhaps), these two individuals do not perfectly master their L2 (yet), therefore, as a (weird!) counter-effect / behaviour, they could feel ashamed of having to recur to their own mother tongue when in need to communicate, and (especially!) in front of dominant language speakers.

32. Do you consider yourself advantaged, compared to your monolingual peers, for knowing more than one language?



As clear as it is, all our respondents (100%) have declared “yes”, that *they feel advantaged, compared to their monolingual peers, for knowing more than one language.*

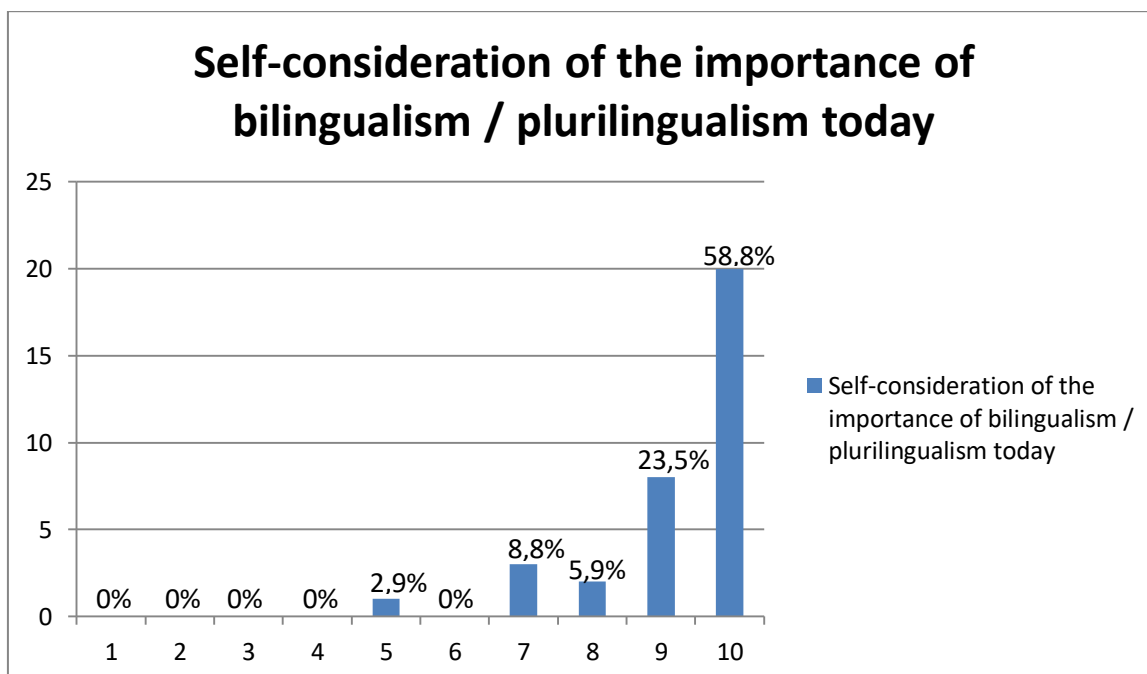
As a crowning of our thesis’ hypothesis, this statement resumes all we have been claiming so far, that “*being bilingual / plurilingual is better than being monolingual*”, (with respect to our purpose of study / research, of course).

Moreover, as we can see from the Table below, there is (logically) no difference between the early bilingual group and the late bilingual one:

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> |
| Yes: 19 | Yes: 15 |
| No: 0 | No: 0 |

In conclusion, we can establish that the “*bilingual / plurilingual advantage*” is felt by all bilingual / plurilingual individuals, regardless of their *age of linguistic acquisition*.

33. On a scale from 1 to 10, how important do you think it is to be bilingual / plurilingual today, with respect to social / academic / job opportunities?



This graph, as the previous one, (although not in such a crystal clear evidence / percentage), shows the degree of importance a bilingual / plurilingual individual might feel / confer to his / her own condition of bilinguality / plurilinguality, in relation to social / academic / job opportunities.

Specifically, we see that the majority (58,8%) of them assigned the 10 (maximum) value to their own perceived belief of “*bilinguality / plurilinguality’s degree of importance*”, followed by 9 (23,5%), 7 (8,8%), 8 (5,9%) and 5 (2,9%).

Worth mentioning, all chosen values are among the medium one (5).

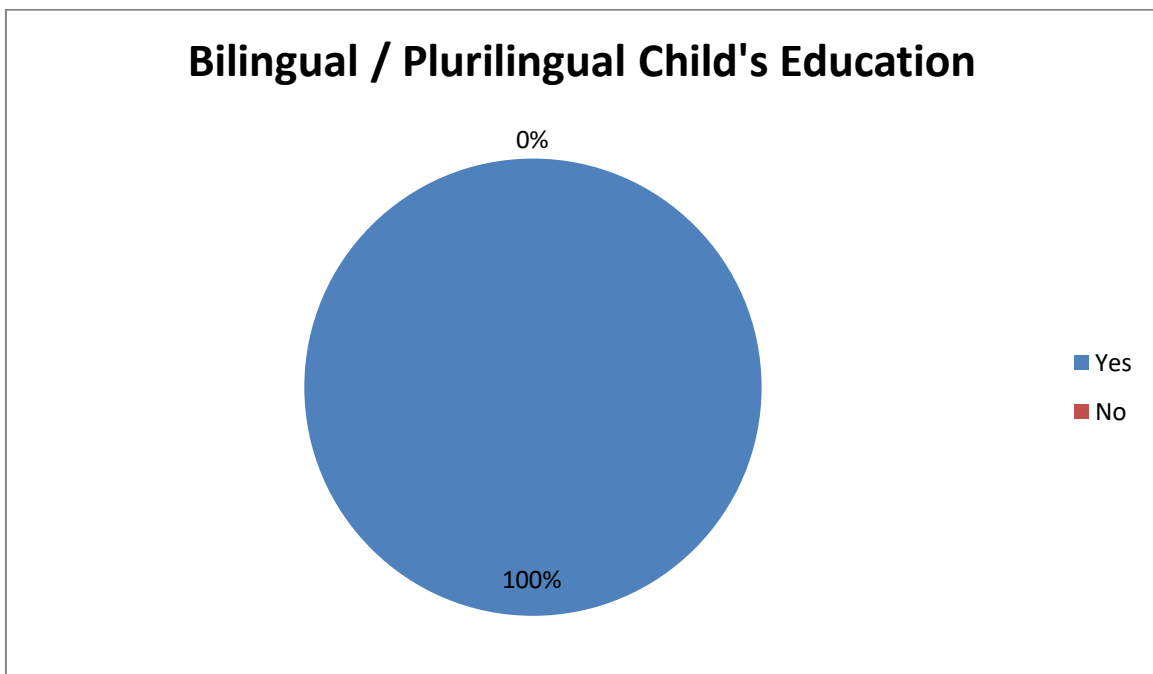
Let us have a further look at the early – late bilingual differentiation:

| Early bilinguals: | | | | | | | | | | | Late bilinguals: | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|--|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | | |
| | | | | | | 1 | | 5 | 13 | | | | | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 | | |

The interesting data to notice here is that the great majority (13) of early bilingual / plurilingual people conferred the maximum (10) value to their degree of bilinguality / plurilinguality's importance, whereas 7 of late bilinguals chose the same value, thus this being a bit lower compared to the first group's one.

Moreover, the 1 and only person choosing the minimum value in the linear scale (5), (such as the lowest chosen value in the overall total of their responses), appears to be a late bilingual individual, thus confirming (once again) our main thesis' claim.

34. Would you raise your child bilingually, given the appropriate circumstances?



As in question 32, what we have here is a total positive percentage (100%) of "yes" answers with respect to such question.

This fact, once again, proves the trueness of our thesis' claim (which we have been supporting and developing until now).

From our point of view, moreover, this result is something which even goes *beyond* our initial purpose of demonstrating our thesis, since it represents the inevitable prospection of one's own bilingual / plurilingual *ideals* onto a *future, to-be existent human being*, a phenomenon / behaviour which is the best we can hope for our humanity.

Nonetheless, here are the specific early – late bilingual results:

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Early bilinguals:</i> Yes: 19 No | <i>Late bilinguals:</i> Yes: 15 No |
|--|---|

35. In case you replied “Yes” in the previous question, say why.

As in question 18, we will report here the respondents' own original (thus, in their mother tongue) answers (because we consider it the most appropriate way to show / value their own fundamental and unique opinions).

Early bilinguals:

- a) *Perché darei anche a mio figlio/a la possibilità di crescere con una maggiore ricchezza linguistica e culturale.*
- b) *Il modo di vedere le cose è diverso ed estremamente stimolante.*
- c) *Maggiori opportunità nella vita.*
- d) *Conoscere più lingue è una ricchezza.*
- e) *Perché sarebbe un'opportunità in più.*
- f) *I vantaggi sono infiniti.*
- g) *Perché è una ricchezza.*
- h) *Credo aiuti a sviluppare una predisposizione all'apprendimento di altre lingue/culture ed un'apertura mentale maggiore.*
- i) *Perché l'età d'apprendimento fa una grande differenza. Probabilmente cercherei il supporto di un/a madrelingua non dovessi vivere in un paese dove si parla la mia L2.*

- j) *Imparare una lingua da piccoli richiede poco sforzo. Anche se non la si impara perfettamente, una volta più grandi è molto più facile riprenderla. Il mio compagno è americano, perciò sarà essenziale crescere figli bilingue.*
- k) *Imparare più lingue aiuta il bambino ad ampliare le proprie abilità cognitive e da molti altri vantaggi.*
- l) *Aumenta non solo la proprio cultura ma anche la propria apertura mentale verso ciò che non si conosce.*
- m) *Perché è sicuramente un vantaggio imparare una seconda lingua da piccoli. Lo ho sperimentato.*
- n) *Una lingua in più ti apre moltissime possibilità per il futuro. E impararla da piccolo è molto più facile che da grande quindi tutto di guadagnato.*
- o) *La società di oggi prevede la conoscenza di più lingue e un insieme di multiculturalità. Ritengo che se si sanno più lingue si riesce ad avere più possibilità lavorative e inoltre si è più aperti mentalmente.*
- p) *Per aprirgli le porte della vita comunitaria, scolastica, economica.*
- q) *Per dargli più opportunità.*
- r) *Perché un bambino apprende molto più facilmente una nuova lingua rispetto ad un adulto e oggi giorno conoscere più lingue è una qualità fondamentale.*
- s) *È essenziale conoscere due lingue, soprattutto se si ha due cittadinanze.*

Late bilinguals:

- a) *Diventa più facile apprendere altre lingue.*
- b) *Perché la mia partner è irlandese quindi naturale che il bimbo parli 2 lingue.*
- c) *Al giorno d'oggi è essenziale per il mondo del lavoro sapere più di una lingua.*
- d) *Perché è un'opportunità immensa poter parlare una lingua senza dover fare il minimo sforzo per impararla, essendo che le viene insegnato fin da neonato!*
- e) *Per aumentare le sue opportunità sociali / accademiche / lavorative.*
- f) *I think it would be very helpful to be raised as a bilingual or even better a multilingual. It provides one with tons of carrier opportunities as well as a better perspective towards life in general. The world is changing and knowing English as the international language would no longer suffice, it's only a prerequisite in most cases and not the closing deal.*
- g) *Lingue=chiavi a nuove esperienze; nuove esperienze facilitano lo sviluppo di carattere.*

- h) *Così sarà bilingue.*
- i) *Avrebbe più possibilità in vita.*
- j) *Maggiori possibilità.*
- k) *Perché altrimenti non lavorerà mai da nessuna parte e non saprà spiegarsi all'estero.*
- l) *Per un bagaglio più ampio.*
- m) *Perché vorrei che i miei figli avessero gli stessi benefici che ho avuto io.*
- n) *Per ricchezza culturale e mentale.*
- o) *Perché migliora apertura mentale, flessibilità e fornisce le possibilità di spostarsi nel mondo senza paura di non poter comunicare.*

6.4. General Discussion of Data Analysis

To resume our overall Data Analysis, we may affirm that our initial claim (on the overall *bilinguals / plurilinguals' advantages over monolinguals* and, along with that, on the *early bilinguals / plurilinguals' "major" advantages over late bilinguals / plurilinguals themselves*) has been firmly established.

We can see that from the 35 questions' results which all, (differing from one another, according to results' percentages, though) confirm the effective validity / trueness of our thesis' claim.

To this purpose, let us have a more precise look at the most relevant data which emerged from the case study's analysis.

- a) The majority of our respondents happened to be *late bilinguals*: this data is not surprising if we look at today's reality, where there is an increasing evidence of the so-called *immigration* phenomenon.

Indeed, people do migrate from one Country to another, due to many reasons and for many purposes, such as: work, study, love, familiar reasons, etc.

We need to acknowledge, therefore, and validate as well, such people's *bilinguality / plurilinguality*, since these individuals (representing, most likely, the great majority of the world's population) will be easily found abroad, with good / perfect, but also bad knowledge (in some circumstances) of that specific language.

Late bilingualism / plurilingualism, in this case, has to be recognized, and rightly valued by monolingual speakers (belonging to the official Country of residence of such *immigrated late bilinguals*).

- b) As a consequence of the previous point, we have seen that the majority of our *late bilingual / plurilingual population* has learnt their L2 (official language of their country of residence) during their adolescence / young adulthood, specifically in between “*age 10 – 30*”. This data points to another important, if not fundamental dimension: that of *age / critical period in language(s) acquisition*.

Indeed, a 10-year old person’s learning of an L2 is probably (in most cases) a direct consequence of his / her family’s immigration to a specific Country. His / her own process of linguistic acquisition, therefore, (mainly according to the critical period hypothesis), will be rather smooth and not affected by major difficulties, given to such *brain plasticity* and other advantages we mentioned in the 1st Chapter “*Language Acquisition (L1, L2, FL)*”.

A 30-year old person’s, on the other hand, learning of an L2 would definitely be a consequence of his / her own migration abroad due to a variety of factors / reasons (namely, work, study, love, etc.), thus such circumstance could (most likely) highlight a major difficulty in his / her own linguistic acquisition process, since the previously mentioned “critical period” would not have a strong influence on his / her own linguistic acquisition outputs anymore.

- c) The majority of our respondents learnt their L2 because they had a 1 year experience as an Exchange Student / they moved abroad or because they learnt it at school: this data, once again, points to the main differentiation between late bilinguals’ L2 acquisition and early bilinguals’ L2 acquisition. In addition, some of them (in this case, late bilinguals), affirmed to have learnt it as a personal choice, for pleasure.
- d) The majority of our respondents (mainly late bilinguals) found little difficulty in learning their L2, since their friends would help them do it, thus speaking slower than usual and giving them linguistic examples and explanations any time they needed it.

As far as the early bilinguals are concerned with, on the other hand, they logically affirmed that they do not remember, since they were only children when they learnt it.

In general, however, it has been found that nobody found extreme difficulty in learning his / her own L2, and that they still do not find it when speaking (even though *early bilinguals* / *plurilinguals* seem to currently experience less difficulty when speaking their L2 compared to their *late bilingual* peers).

The same can be affirmed with respect to the *effort* they put in speaking their own L2: in other words, nobody appears to be putting much effort when speaking (except for a minority of them, who claimed that sometimes it does, especially when they are tired).

- e) The majority of our respondents do *mix* / *switch* their languages when speaking, and this is just a clear demonstration that the phenomenon of *code-mixing* / *code-switching* is something which is peculiar / characteristic to all bilingual / plurilingual individuals, regardless of their age of L2(s) acquisition.

Moreover, being these interviewed people highly motivated students / professionals or, in general, people who do have a career, the fact that they still find themselves, nowadays, “falling” into such mechanical mechanisms does not make them cognitively disadvantaged / inferior to monolingual speakers (as it was instead once claimed, with respect to such linguistic phenomena’s evidences).

- f) The majority of our respondents also do dream in their L2(s), regardless of their age of language acquisition. This fact proves the important, influential impact that an L2 / FL might have / confer to one’s own mind / mentality.
- g) Half of our respondents affirmed to experience some (slight) difficulty when speaking *specialised L2*, depending on how confident they feel on the subject. This data appears reasonable, since everybody (even monolinguals) would claim the same thing with respect to such concept of “*difficulty in specialised language speaking*”.

However, it has been found that more *early bilinguals* do not have any difficulty with respect to that, contrary to many other *late bilinguals* who, on the other hand, affirmed the opposite thing.

This last data, therefore, confirms the *early bilinguals’ cognitive / linguistic “superiority” over late bilinguals*.

- h) The neat majority of our respondents do not translate from their L1 to their L2 when speaking, with no distinction among early and late bilinguals. This is an interesting data, since it clarifies the bilingual / plurilingual different approach to

language learning compared to the usual monolingual FL learners' one (who, most of the times, actually do translate from their L1 to their FL when attempting to produce something in that specific language they are studying, thus making conversation (and production in general) less natural and more mechanical).

- i) The average early / late bilingual speaker feels rather confident in speaking both / all of his / her languages, with no neat distinctions between early and late bilinguals.

However, late bilinguals appear to have a dominant language, whereas early bilinguals do not have it. This data can be explained by recurring to the *critical period* hypothesis. As previously explained, an *early simultaneous bilingual / plurilingual individual* will most likely, in all cases, develop a so-called *balanced type of bilingualism / plurilingualism*, whereas a *late successive bilingual / plurilingual individual* will most likely, in all cases, develop a so-called *dominant type of bilingualism*.

This, once again, points to the effective, inherent, “superiority”/ advantage of the early bilingual / plurilingual population over the late bilingual / plurilingual one.

- j) The majority of our respondents affirmed that they would never completely forget their minority language, only the naturalness and fluency of it would initially be affected.

On the other hand, many early bilinguals also affirmed that it is impossible that such incidence takes place, since they regularly speak it with their family or, in general, because they learnt it when they were children (which points, once again, to the critical period hypothesis).

In general, in other words, the majority of them affirmed that, if not-used, their minority language's competencies would only become a bit “rusty”, but only for a short period (even for a couple of hours / days) before they would re-start speaking that language.

- k) The majority of them affirmed that, being bilinguals / plurilinguals, they do have a richer vocabulary at their disposal but this, though, could be a problem, since they would sometimes find themselves in such situations where they would like to say something in one language, but they would only know how to say it in the other language.

- l) Most of our respondents watch TV in their L1 (the language they learnt first, as children) and these individuals could be most likely classified as late bilinguals who do not have a good L2 competency yet.

On the other hand, other respondents claimed to watch it in the official language (L2) of their country of residence (even if it is not their major language / L1), consequently they could be classified as both early and late bilinguals: this data points to the fact that such behaviour is just a consequence / is in relation of a “*linguistic choice*” they have made on their own, based on their *attitudes, motivation, preferences*.

- m) Most of our respondents (both early and late bilinguals) prefer reading in their L2, because it is a challenge for their linguistic abilities, thus pointing to their own overall good attitude towards their languages and the value / utility they confer to them.

- n) The average bilingual / plurilingual individual (both early and late ones) does not think that he / she would find any / much difficulty in learning other, multiple languages. This data, once again, points to the effective difference (advantage) with respect to (the majority of) monolingual individuals who, on the other hand, (and especially if they start learning a FL / L2 after the critical period / sensible period of language(s) acquisition) would probably claim the opposite thing, namely that they find it hard to learn multiple languages (FLs or L2s).

- o) All our bilingual / plurilingual respondents have a general positive opinion regarding their bilingual / plurilingual influence on education / school achievement / professional career.

This, once again, points to the general (cognitive, social, cultural) advantages of bilingualism / plurilingualism in today’s society.

- p) The majority of our bilingual / plurilingual respondents, being bilinguals / plurilinguals, feel more comfortable when going abroad because they can always explain themselves using one or another language.

Moreover, they claim that they would also move abroad with no L2 knowledge because they like linguistic / cultural challenges (being these ones used to, indeed).

Nonetheless, the majority of them (both early and late bilinguals), would also work for a multinational company which requires them to speak only their

minority language. Such thing, in conclusion, would most likely not be claimed by monolingual speakers.

- q) Not all our bilingual / plurilingual respondents consider themselves also bicultural / pluricultural. This might be due to a variety of factors, such as (mainly) their own integration in that specific society, their own preferences, motivation, attitudes, etc.

In other words, we may conclude that every people, hence, is unique, thus different from any other, according to such dimension.

- r) A neat majority of our respondents affirmed to have found and still find themselves in situations where they have to *mediate* between different linguistic / cultural groups (of people). As claimed in the Data Analysis section, indeed, “this data, (which could also be of interest to monolingual people found in inter-relational / inter-communicative situations), emphasise the important role of bilingual / plurilingual individuals in today’s society, given its now irreversible multilingual / multicultural nature. As a matter of fact, there will always be (an increasing) need of interlinguistic / intercultural mediators among such different people / societies, therefore such bilingual / plurilingual people’s existence is something which must, indeed, being promoted and given the right, deserved value.”

- s) The majority of our respondents do not feel embarrassed when speaking their minority language among dominant language speakers (except for some late bilingual individuals who might have claimed that because of their incomplete / inefficient mastery of their dominant (official) language, from which a sense of “embarrassment” and “inferiority” towards dominant language speakers emerges).

Once again, the emphasis here is on the advantageous position of early bilingual individuals compared to late ones.

- t) All of our respondents feel advantaged for knowing more than one language and, consequently, confer the maximum value of importance to his / her own condition of bilinguality / plurilinguality with respect to today’s social / academic / job opportunities.

As a consequence, all of them would raise their children bilingually / plurilingually, in order to give them the same advantages they have been experiencing in their lives.

This demonstrates, in conclusion, that our respondents do actually confirm our thesis' statement, such as: "the bilingual / plurilingual advantages from a cognitive and intercultural / relational point of view at a social, academic and working level".

6.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we may confirm the fact that the crowning of this thesis on "*Plurilingual Acquisition of Language: Early vs Late Bilingualism Comparison. The Bilingual Advantages from a Cognitive and Intercultural / Relational point of view at a Social, Academic and Working Level*" could not have been other than the case study reported above.

This one, indeed, (as we affirmed at the beginning of the Chapter), allowed us to contextualise such theory of research (which we had been describing and analysing over the course of our Thesis), thus pointing (implicitly) to the effective cognitive and intercultural / relational differences at a social, academic and working level among monolingual and bilingual / plurilingual individuals and, explicitly, more specifically and most importantly, among *early* bilingual individuals and *late* bilingual individuals.

Nonetheless, we can claim that such *screening* may have helped (and possibly, will *do* help in the present and in the future) not only the individuals to whom this Questionnaire was submitted, but also all people (professionals in the field, researchers, students, etc.), who *do* have a real interest in acknowledging the importance of a *bilingual / plurilingual society* in today's world and, most importantly, *do* want to make a change in societal common view regarding bilingual / plurilingual myths, misconceptions, and resistance towards bilingual / plurilingual education.

Specifically, our Questionnaire evidenced some fundamental points, such as:

- a) The majority of our bilingual / plurilingual respondents are *late bilinguals / plurilinguals*, having learnt their L2s because "*they had to: they moved to a foreign country for studying / working purposes*" or because "*it was their choice to learn another language*": this data is fundamental for the purpose of acknowledging the worldwide changing phenomenon of *immigration*, which inevitably comes along a bi-/plurilingualism challenging phenomenon.

- b) The bilinguals / plurilinguals' apparent *absent / small difficulty* in learning *other, multiple languages*, which constitutes a relevant cognitive advantage over their monolingual peers (who might find major difficulties in learning subsequent other languages).
- c) The bilinguals / plurilinguals' *bilinguality / plurilinguality's positive influence on education / school achievement / professional career*, which once again collocates them in an advantaged position (according to social – working levels) compared to their monolingual peers.
- d) The bilinguals / plurilinguals' *major comfortability abroad* (in terms of *communication / inter-relational* advantages) compared to their monolingual peers.
- e) The bilinguals / plurilinguals' *ability / possibility* to “*move abroad with no L2 knowledge*” or to “*work in a multinational company which requires them the only use of their minority language*” which, once again, collocates them in a better socio-economic position with respect to their monolingual peers;
- f) The interrelation between the *bilingual / plurilingual* and *bicultural / pluricultural* dimensions in bilinguals / plurilinguals' identities, which facilitates the “*construction*” of such *inter-linguistic / cultural bridges*, which are so much needed in our today's society.
- g) The bilinguals' / plurilinguals' own *self-consideration* on the *importance of being a bilingual / plurilingual individual* in today's society, therefore all its inner *advantages* it portrays, and the *necessity to raise bilingual / plurilingual children* in our globalised, multilingual / multicultural world.
- h) The *minor difficulty* encountered by *children (early bilinguals)* in *acquiring language* (any kind and any amount of them), in speaking *specialised language* and, overall, in *maintaining their cognitive (and subsequent, future social / cultural / relational / academic / working) advantages* over *late bilinguals / plurilinguals* themselves (therefore, not only over monolingual people).

The aim of this Questionnaire, therefore, (which has been *attained*, thus *positively confirmed*), was to demonstrate the focus of the overall thesis' theoretical framework.

This one, in particular, through a detailed analysis of *bilingual / plurilingual research* (which included the discussion of its inner processes of language acquisition, the critical periods hypothesis, its main characteristics, the main different types of bilingualism /

plurilingualism, the false myths inherent to it and the different typologies of advantages caused by such condition), evidenced (and lately confirmed with the application of the case study) the hypothesis that “bilingual / plurilingual individuals *do* have advantages, compared to their monolingual peers, at all levels of society, and at all stages of *life* (specifically, taking the *future-oriented possibilities*’ dimension into account), according to a variety of factors which induce such positive influences on them, with respect to their overall cognitive development and to their social / communicative / intercultural advantages.”

Moreover, as we have evidenced in the *case study’s results*, the most fundamental step to take, in order to permit such increased awareness with respect to the advantaged nature of bilingualism / plurilingualism (and all its inherent benefits which can be conferred directly to society), is to *acknowledge* and *exploit* the importance of *bilingual / plurilingual early education*.

Hence, from our analysis of the many studies and evidences which have represented a watershed moment in bilingual / plurilingual research over the course of the last century until now, we have (hopefully, to all readers), showed, and demonstrated, the importance of *raising a child bilingually / plurilingually*, given the appropriate circumstances.

As a matter of fact, it has been demonstrated that a bilingual / plurilingual child’s natural linguistic acquisition is something which we can hardly believe it is possible: his / her incredible, “*unnaturally natural*” ability to learn any and any amount of languages, since the first day of his / her life, is something which no words can explain.

Of course, we do not want to sound too majestic, there are definitely many neurological studies which have evidenced the reasons why such *infant / childish* ability takes place and makes this phenomenon possible, but still, it seems to us very important, if not fundamental, to remind everybody of us, even the most sceptical, that a *bilingual / plurilingual education must thus always be sustained, encouraged, and exploited*.

A bilingual / plurilingual individual, therefore, who grows up developing his / her own linguistic abilities in both / all of his / her languages since birth or early in life (generally before puberty hits), will always and in all circumstances be advantaged, not only compared to his / her monolingual peers, but also to his / her *late bilingual* colleagues.

Having said so, we absolutely do not want to affirm that “*being a late bilingual is no better than being a monolingual*”, with respect to all the linguistic / non-linguistic abilities we have claimed to impact on their development so far: indeed, *being bilingual / plurilingual, whatever degree of its competences / period of acquisition / linguistic dominance one has, is already a huge bonus with respect to a monolingual’s standard cognitive / intercultural and relational level / ability, seen from many point of views.*

Being an *early bilingual*, therefore, according to our point of view, can be considered an *extra bonus* in terms of such *linguistic and non-linguistic abilities which may influence his / her own reality and possibilities in present and future life.*

In conclusion, in other words, the main “*behavioural – proposal*” we might suggest to our readers is that to actually *always sustain, encourage and exploit bilingual / plurilingual education.*

As a matter of fact, given some specific circumstances in today’s society, we should start from them to building a more *approachable kind of bilingual / plurilingual world.* Therefore, since “all findings on the positive effects of bilingualism on cognitive development and social development signal the importance of *intervening factors* that maximize or minimize cognitive and social development” (Garcis, 2011), these ones should thus be taken and (always) exploited as a reinforcement, and not as a disrupting factor towards a more bilingual / plurilingual interactive / integrative kind of world.

As Dewaele *et al.* claim, indeed, in “Bilingualism: Beyond Basic Principles” (2003), “the number of bi- and multilingual speakers a country produces may be seen as an indicator of its educational standards, economic competitiveness and cultural vibrancy. Clearly, bilingualism may be a condition to be aspired to and cherished, rather than one to be prevented or remedied.” (Dewaele *et al.*, 2003: 1-9)

Moreover, “bilingualism is more than the instrumental advantage of being able to communicate in several languages; its main importance is social and psychological: the psychological heart of bilingualism is identity (Edwards, 2003: 28-41)” (Dewaele *et al.*, 2003: 1-9), therefore “bilingualism should not be perceived as a problem but rather as an opportunity to develop the resources of a country more fully by implementing bilingual and trilingual programmes for minority language children. Absurd claims concerning bilingualism need to be countered in order to overcome the socio-political obstacles. (Cummins, 2003: 56)” (Dewaele *et al.*, 2003: 1-9)

Practically, a clear and pragmatic *political choice* should be made towards a right validation and exploitation of bilingual / plurilingual education, which is something that has actually already been attained in some countries of the world, such as France (specifically, in Corsica, “Corse”), where the “Assemblée de Corse” in 2005 established that one’s own condition of bilingualism / plurilingualism represents “an advantage for our youth, offering them a unique tool for self-expression, creativity and intellectual development in the context of a bilingualism that can prepare them for the multilingualism that will be a necessity for every future European citizen. (Assemblée de Corse, 2005: 4)” (Heller, 2007: 65-66)

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