

LINELT 2013

Bilingualism Challenges in HEUROPA!

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a survey on bilingual language learning. The survey was aimed at Czech, Polish and Lithuanian parents and teachers of bilingual children living in the surrounding cultures of Germany, France and Great Britain. The study was conducted to gain insights into the bilingual language acquisition process and specific language learning problems of the target group in order to develop tailor-made teaching and learning materials that will be accessible via an online-platform. Following an introduction on bilingualism and factors that influence its development, this paper summarises the survey's findings, e.g. the motivation for children and parents to learn the language of the country of origin, speaking and code-switching habits, language acquisition methods and specific language difficulties of the target group.

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1. Introduction

The main objective of the paper is to identify the special linguistic needs of bilingual children, their learning style and the difficulties they have to tackle with special regard to the development of a learning platform. We asked those involved mainly in the learning process of bilingual children: their parents and teachers at Saturday schools.

This rough summary presents the answers retrieved from parents. Graphs refer to a total number of 113 respondents. 52 of them are of Polish, 45 of Czech and 16 of Lithuanian origin.

The survey among parents furthermore seeks to gain insight into the speaking customs and language awareness in bilingual families, the motivation of the partner to join activities in Czech, Polish or Lithuanian. It should answer the questions, how do parents try to involve their children in language learning, what would support them best in

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their effort to raise children bilingually.

It is important to state, that the study represents the attitudes and approaches of only those that participated on a voluntary basis and it therefore can not be claimed to be representative of the whole Czech, Polish and Lithuanian community living abroad.

The identification of the needs of the target group is based on survey among teachers in Saturday schools in the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Russia, the United States.

What we asked?

1. Usage of CS, PL, LT at home; situations when children/parents switch between languages.
2. The nature of problems with listening, reading, writing, conversation.
3. Particular difficulties with pronunciation and spelling.
4. What do parents to support language acquisition.
5. The other parent's willingness to learn to speak Czech, Lithuanian, Polish.
6. What parents and teachers want and expect from a learning platform.

Chart 1. Where do respondents live?

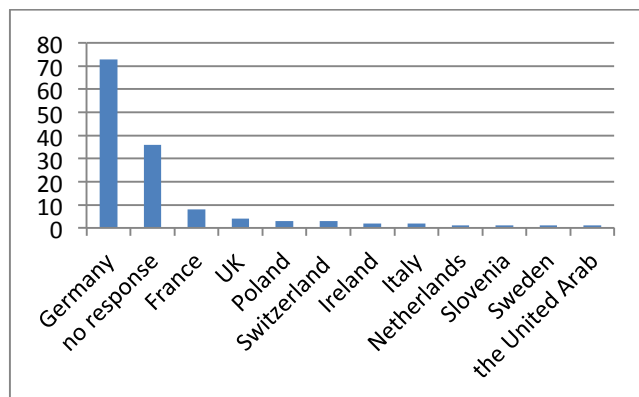


Chart 2. Motivation of the partner who does not speak Czech, Lithuanian or Polish to join activities in that language

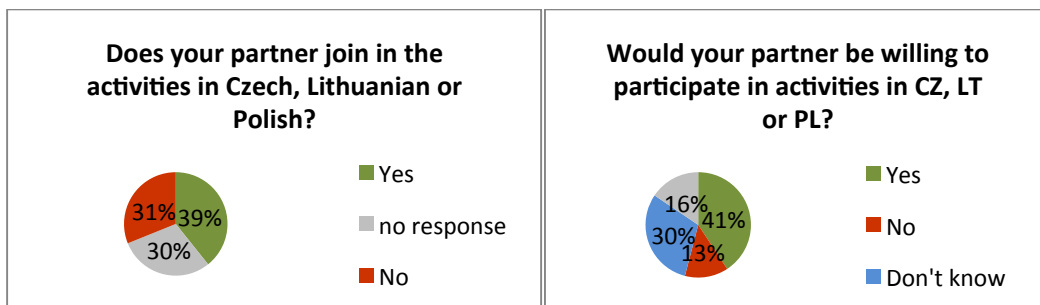


Chart 3. What prevents your partner from learning Czech, Polish or Lithuanian?

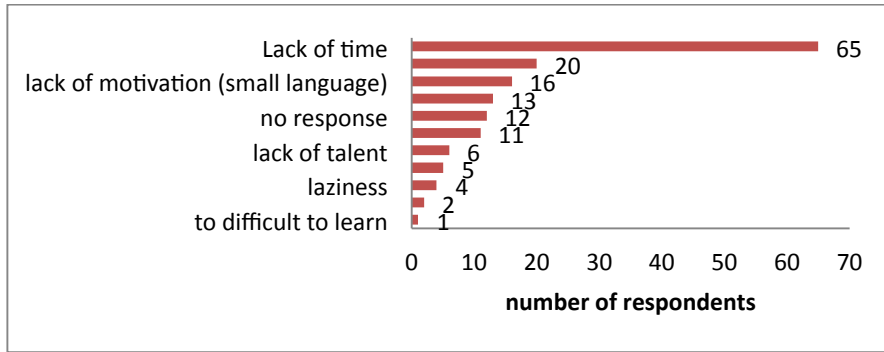
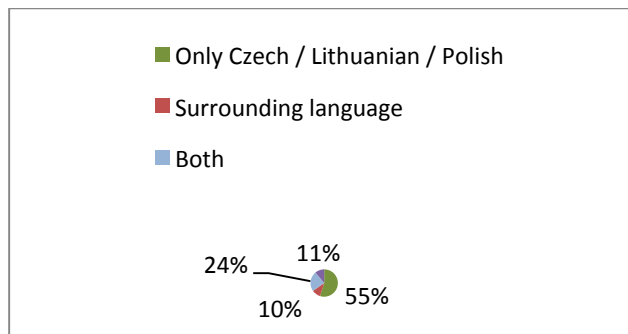


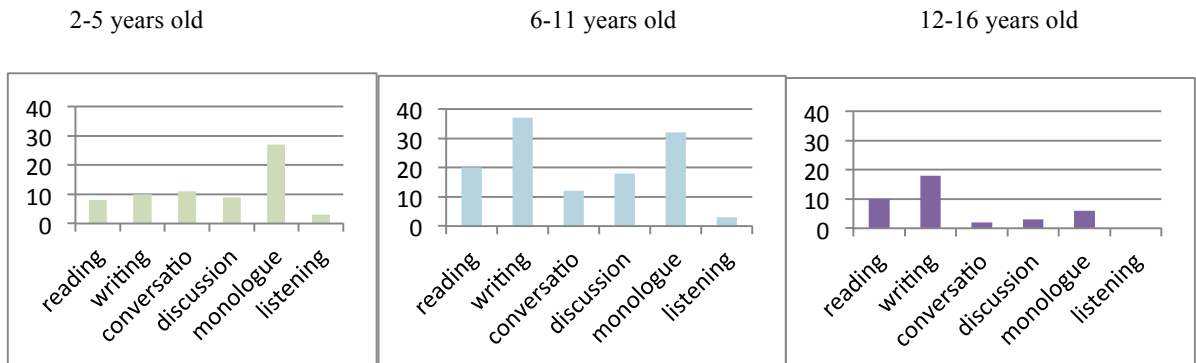
Chart 4. Communication and speaking customs in bilingual families



The Chart 4 shows which language do parents prefer in communication with their children (refers to the total number of children including siblings).

Regarding the language switching: never when talking to mother or father, but in the presence of classmates, friends, in most situations in public, if the other parent is taking part in the conversation, when talking about experiences from school / nursery or when doing homework, when a parent wants to make sure that the child understood the prohibition / instruction.

Chart 5. The most difficult skills to bilingual children



During the Survey it was also aimed at evaluating motivation of the bilingual children. In this case

parents were asked to indicate an appropriate answer. The items have been presented in descending order: 1) we read books together and talk about them; 2) we look together at movies / TV shows in CS, LT, PL; 3) we give instructions in CS, LT, PL when playing games / in sports, 4) we've built a circle of Czech/Polish/Lit. speaking friends; 5) we send him/her to a Saturday school; 6) we visit relatives in PL, CS, LT on a regular basis; 7) we read fairy tales and stories and listen to Czech/Polish/Lit. songs; 8) we play together on the computer; 9) playing with language – invent stories, language riddles.

The research reveals the difficulties the respondents faced at various language levels:

1. Difficulties in language areas / skills: 1) understand a spoken text / narration; 2) narrative description of experiences and stories, picture description; 3) formation of longer sentences; 4) read aloud with proper intonation; 5) spelling; 6) writing short texts, such as invitations and greeting cards.

2. Difficulties in vocabulary: 1) gaps in the vocabulary; 2) adoption of words from the dominant language (in specific situations), eg. fr – cz *kurżetka , *flanbík; de – pl *gabelek, *sztoczek; 3) lack of knowledge of idioms and phrases, collocations or inappropriate use; 4) differentiation of terms, semantic relations between words appropriate use of stylistically colored means and phrases.

3. Difficulties in morphology: 1) nouns and adjectives; 2) adoption of the gender from the dominant language, eg. *sosa instead of pol. sos; 3) incorrect choice of inflectional endings; 4) animacy with male nouns verbs / verbal expressions; 5) use of the verbal aspect; 6) gender with verbs when reporting → „My son talks about himself in the feminine form“; 7) addressing people using the right form.

4. Difficulties in syntax and word formation: 1) uses the sentence structure of the dominant language; 2) government patterns for verbs and nouns; 3) completion of words in the right form; 4) correct use of prepositions ask for an object / the missing phrase, ask a formally correct question; 5) form words by derivation; 6) meaning of some prefixes and suffixes.

Conclusions

Based on a needs analysis we have been able to determine those capabilities that need special attention, how parents can support their children in the language learning process, and which materials and practice exercises are preferable.

The main focus in the selecting of the topics and the orientation for the individual age groups has been in accordance with current framework teaching syllabi for Polish foreign schools as well as for the „Czech School Without Borders“.

All the language games are minutely annotated on this basis, and they can be selected based on the topic, the ability, the respective language objective in the language (eg. greeting s.o., writing a postcard etc.) as well as the special language features.

The platform enables teachers to search for games, exercises and illustrated stories by didactic criteria; to download worksheets for group and writing activities, exchange ideas and upload your own worksheets.

The platform enables children and parents play and learn, record their own voice, gather points and parts of a big puzzle, practice the vocabulary of the games on their mobile phones, compile tailored "courses", download worksheets, exchange views with other parents, print the pictorial dictionaries for coloring.

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